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Hints to young men



HINTS TO YOUNG MEN

FROM THE

PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

BY THE

REV. JOHN LEYBURN, D.D.,

OF BALTIMORE.



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TO
THE MANY YOUNG MEN—

RESIDENTS OF BALTIMORE OR STUDENTS FROM VARIOUS
STATES OF OUR GREAT COUNTRY IN THE MEDICAL
AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING—

WHO HAVE WITHIN THE LAST TWENTY YEARS ATTENDED
UPON THE AUTHOR'S MINISTRY,

AND ALSO

TO THE YOUNG MEN OF BALTIMORE ATTENDING THE SAME,
ESPECIALLY THE SUNDAY-NIGHT SERVICES,

THIS VOLUME

—ONE OF THE FRUITS OF THE LATTER—

IS

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

ON coming to this city twenty years ago to take charge of a broken-down congregation, among other devices to awaken interest was the suggestion—not very novel—by a venerable elder of a series of sermons to young men. The suggestion was not carried out, for the reason that the author, having had no special experience in preaching to this interesting class, doubted his competency. In the course of time, however, a number of young men began to attend the Sunday-night services, and they were sometimes specially referred to in the sermons. This, with the effort made to present subjects in a common-sense rather than in a scholastic or professional manner, brought, and has kept, such numbers of young men that they have become one of the marked features of the congregation—so much so that during the winter months, when the capacious church is full, often the large majority are men. The author ventures

this statement as a reason for the appearance of this volume, and as an encouragement to others to enter this important field of Christian work.

The author hopes that in these "Hints" he has not taken undue liberties with the parable; he has only endeavored to illustrate the Scripture words by the usual conduct of a dissipated young man.

BALTIMORE, 1887.

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LIFE UNDER THE OLD ROOF.

"A certain man had two sons : and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me."

LUKE xv. 11, 12.

HINTS TO YOUNG MEN.

I.

LIFE UNDER THE OLD ROOF.

THIS scene, though laid in a distant land and a remote age, we need not find much difficulty in picturing. In Oriental countries there is little change from one generation to another. The Palestine of to-day presents much the same aspect, animate and inanimate, as in Bible days; so that one of the chief items of interest to the stranger is the feeling that he is all the while having brought before him tableaux from the Scriptures. The ancestral abodes crowning the hills of Palestine in her palmy days may not by any means be reproduced in the downtrodden and desolate land of to-day, but the type is the same. We have the flat-roofed cubical structure of stone or plaster, remarkable especially for the absence of windows; the door or gateway wide enough to admit beasts of burden;

clumps of the stiff bluish-green olive tree, and possibly of palm, somewhat relieving the dreariness ; a veiled female figure bearing a water-vessel on her head approaching from a neighboring well ; and a little caravan straggling lazily along the rugged path that serves for a highway. In the adjacent fields are laboring-men in Oriental garb, their implements of most simple and primitive type. This particular estate bears the aspect of more than usual thrift and prosperity for that day and that comparatively dull and quiet portion of the world.

The proprietor has made the interior of his home accordant with Oriental ideas—the stone floor adorned with rugs ; a divan or two against the walls, and in the centre a brazen chafing-dish in which coals may be lighted in chilly weather ; simple hangings at the windows looking on the court or hollow square ; vines shading the outside of the windows as well as forming a canopy over the door ; and the structure including on its various sides not only the family residence and the servants' apartments, but stables for horses and cattle. The home arrangements all look upon the court, the exterior having the appearance of being constructed for protection and defence, those times not having the same provision for security by bolts and bars as

in our more mechanical age, and being more liable to disturbance from marauders.

The proprietor of this domain lives in an easy, dignified way and is cheered in the not very exciting life by a small family circle. The fact that we do not read of the wife and mother is not necessarily evidence that she was not living and attending to household duties, inasmuch as Oriental ideas, then as now, kept women in seclusion, especially among the more elevated classes. For the same reason the fact that daughters are not mentioned is no evidence that there were none; sons were the chief object of family pride, and two of these had been given to this house. As we shall see, these two young persons bore to each other but little resemblance in character, and their histories were destined to be very dissimilar.

The father and these two sons constitute what may be termed the *dramatis personæ* of the subject to which we propose to devote a few discourses, more especially confining ourselves to the younger of the brothers, now widely renowned and characterized, because of a most discreditable history, as "the prodigal son." Our object is not so much to follow closely the minutiae of the narrative as to make it the framework around which to gather

hints and instructions accordant with the leading idea and adapted to enlist the interest and to fasten the attention of young men on views of truth and duty such as may prove to them of permanent profit.

We take as our topic for the present, "Life Under the Old Roof."

Life may naturally be divided into four parts—first, childhood and youth, the time of anticipation, within the home, uninitiated into responsibility and care; next, young manhood, the time of temptation and exposure after leaving home; thirdly, mature manhood, the time of trial and responsibility amid struggles and burdens; and fourthly, the time of comparative rest and leisure when the evening shadows are gathering around. It is with the first and the second of these that at present we have to do. We come, therefore, to the consideration of home life.

HOME AS A TRAINING-SCHOOL.

Abundant are the schools where children may be educated. Often it is difficult so to decide between them, both as to the primary and as to the ultimate one, that the child may in due time enter the world to the best advantage. But how often it is forgot-

ten that the true primary school is the home—a primary school which seizes the immortal being at the earliest dawn of intelligence and trains for good or for evil both the mental and the moral qualities ! What in all animated nature is so much in want of knowledge and of training as the infantile human being ? Is there any creature, according to its circumstances, so ignorant, so helpless, so much in need of watch and care ? It cannot walk, it cannot talk, it cannot understand language, it cannot supply its own wants even as to what is vitally requisite. It is a poor helpless, dependent thing, and on the course pursued by others turns largely its destiny. It has absolutely no acquaintance with the world into which it has come. Everything is strange. Even were the mind developed to some extent, if it could observe and decide, it has no powers. Physically as well as mentally and morally it must be regulated and controlled by a will outside itself. Then how important the conditions surrounding the human being on its advent into this world ! for these conditions go far to determine its destiny for time and for eternity. It is but clay in the hands of the potter. Then as the intelligence begins to unfold and the capacity for knowledge expands how largely impressions and ideas depend on

circumstances either adventitious or arranged ! The child has to learn everything from others—habits, customs, language, for it cannot even speak. The language indispensable to communicating with the race to which it belongs it must acquire word by word. How truly is home a training-school—the primary school of all !

Parents, if they are what they should be, are a gospel to the child ; by them is largely fashioned that immortal organism the soul. How important their function ! How weighty the responsibility ! What immeasurable consequences result from the circumstances in which the human being receives his first impressions and takes his first steps on the road through time to eternity !

Judging from the ultimate issue in the family which we are to make our theme, it was a well-ordered house ; there were good training and a wholesome moral atmosphere. But even the best home influences are not always productive of the best results ; they do not always neutralize and overcome the bad traits. It is not always true that with the best example, the best sentiments, the best moral atmosphere and the best religious instruction a waywardly-disposed boy can be prevented from becoming a prodigal son. Spite of kindly, loving,

gentle, prayerful, persistent care, sometimes it appears that he must and will sow his wild oats. From under the old roof of our subject one of two sons steps out on the wrong road.

HOME AS A PLACE FOR ENJOYMENT.

Various elements go to make a rightly-constituted home enjoyable to its inmates. Indeed, nothing has awakened more beautiful sentiment than home; about nothing have poets sung more sweetly. What song of sentiment has won more universal popularity than that whose theme is,

“Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home”?

One of the poets has said,

“Man through all ages of revolving time—
Unchanging man—in every varying clime,
Deems his own land of every land the pride,
Belov’d by Heaven o’er all the world beside;
His home the spot of earth supremely blest—
A dearer, sweeter spot than all the rest.”

As a place of enjoyment for its youngest members home has the special advantage that but little is requisite to give pleasure. Ignorant of the world and of its great temptations, its cravings, its ambitions, its contests, its jealousies and its hates, the

young are as yet free from the great disturbing elements. Their expectations and demands are simple and easily gratified. Even exuberance of gladness and glee emanate from small material. With good health, congenial companions, simple sports, theirs are happy days. With relish and zest and rarely-failing appetite food is enjoyed ; and when the time for rest arrives, they lay themselves down to dreamless sleep. Such would seem the almost perfection of the human being in childhood.

As childhood passes into youth and incipient manhood other sources for gratification are opened, but with these must also be encountered greatly-enhanced exposure, temptation and risk. The vigor and the freshness of childhood have developed into the exuberance of boyhood and young manhood ; the affections and the passions have gained strength ; the will has become more resolute and the disposition less tractable. The problem now is to bring this living material into control and subjugation, so as to make life a success and not a failure. Questions as to duties and indulgences, as to obedience and authority, as to which shall carry his point, father or child, as to the thousand nameless things where home government comes in,—how great the difficulties ! how momentous the responsibilities !

How often is the destiny of the young immortal for time and for eternity decided at this early period !

Another element often enters here—viz., parental pride. If the boy expanding into manhood has qualities to recommend him as to appearance, intellect, manners, or whatever may render him a youth of mark, the parents' pride is aroused. He is their hearts' delight ; he is treated with deference ; his opinions and his wishes are respected ; he becomes more and more the arbiter of his own course, until it is plain that the reins of authority have passed out of the parents' hands. This is the time the mother takes the decisive step as to her son. Proud of him, she humors him, and makes no effort to curb his indulgences or to break his strong will, allows him his own way, no matter at whose expense, and rather helps than hinders him in his devious and more doubtful ways. Poor thing ! She little thinks she is doing a work which is to fill her heart with sorrow and regret until her head is laid in the grave, and afterward. The mistaken kindness and the ill-starred indulgences are singularly unfortunate for this already pampered youth. His presumptions and exactions "grow by what they feed upon." The entire household must more or less succumb to the young master. If not, if

crossed in his purposes or wishes, no matter how unreasonable or audacious, he declares independence, speaks his mind freely and intimates that he will find quarters elsewhere.

It is not impossible that our prodigal had made a discreditable history of this sort before taking his departure from under the old roof. He could hardly at a single bound have attained the height of presumption requisite for the demand for the portion of goods which would ultimately be coming to him ; he must have reached it by successive aggressions. Some commentators, indeed, intimate that the usage of the times sanctioned giving to sons their share of the estate whilst the father still survived, but of this there is no satisfactory evidence, and in itself the thing is highly improbable.

This youth was a striking contrast to the brother, but such is not unusual in families. Not uncommon is it to hear the remark as to the contrast between two brothers or sisters : “ You wouldn’t think they had a drop of the same blood in them ; they are totally unlike.” Some are restless, proud, irascible ; others are gentle and amiable. Some are energetic and driving ; others are sluggish and heavy.

The youth who furnishes the theme for these

lectures was endowed with a large stock of animal life, strength of temper, restlessness, warm passions—one who felt that, though his home was good enough, yet it was too quiet and dull for a spirited young man. He hears the echoes of the far-off great world with its pomp and pageantry, its clamor and clash of enterprise and activity, and especially its pleasures, entertainments, revelries, tempting to a young man with his tastes, and he longs to be there. This commotion within him ultimately finds utterance. He approaches his father with the extraordinary proposition, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.” He might as well have said, “If you were dead, I should get a portion of the estate; I have come to ask that you give it to me now.” If he had spoken out what was in his heart, he would have added, “I want to have a chance to see what is to be seen and to enjoy myself—as is natural for a young man, you know—and that requires money.” The echo of the great world grows louder and louder, and he longs to be gone; so the indulgent father gives him the portion. Everything is made ready for the journey, good-byes are spoken, possibly a shallow tear trickles down the ruddy cheek, and soon the old homestead is left behind, and

the eager, impulsive youth is on his way to the far-off land.

HOME AS A PLACE OF RESTRAINT.

In this case this element does not seem to have been so pronounced as it might have been, else the presumptuous son's demand would not have been acceded to; he would have been relegated back to his proper place in the home economy, and would have had to "wait on Providence" for his portion of the goods, thinking to himself, perhaps, amid the trial of his patience, that truly "the mills of the gods do grind slowly."

Order is Nature's first law, order is home's first law, and in every well-regulated home it is law. Eminently healthful and important is it that there should be government in a little community like the family, just as in the state. A state without rule would not be worthy the name; it would be a mob. So with the home: there must be rule; God has appointed rule. It is a despotism that God has ordained, not a republic. Parents are the authorized rulers; born to rule, their will is law, and this by divine right. Families there are, indeed—only too many—where this Heaven-ordained

system is set aside, but it is always at the expense of the happiness of the household.

Order being the family's first law, there is a place for every one, and every one should be in his place. Should this be without the consciousness of law, the offspring of love and cheerful habit, all the better ; but it must be there or there cannot be a happy home. Should there be selfishness, presumption, ill-temper, willfulness, over-reaching, on the part of any one of the number, then authority must interpose, not only for the protection of the innocent, but for the welfare of the aggressor, who is not merely encroaching upon the rights of others, but also doing himself a stupendous wrong. Sometimes God's order is reversed. Sometimes a son—a wayward son—rules father, mother, brothers, sisters, every one, indeed, but himself.

Some years ago, when living in another city, I had an old-lady friend who had enjoyed every advantage—advantages of birth, of abundant means, of society, of life in foreign lands. She was a sweet, gentle, loving mother. The remains of beauty still lingered about her aged face. She had a son who had also had every advantage, but she had not trained him according to the principles we are advocating. She “loved him not wisely” and

“but too well.” She indulged him wellnigh to the utmost, and therein, as she had abundant reason to feel, the dragon’s seed she had sown brought forth both for him and for her a most abundant harvest of sorrow. The time came when from such husbandry the old almost broken-hearted mother was laden with sheaves of anguish and woe. I have seen that son when steeped in drink stand and curse her to her face. I have known her to sit at the window into the small hours of the night listening for her prodigal’s footsteps, her doting heart still yearning over him; and when at last he came, with his debauched, drunken breath he cursed her for waiting.

Yes, order in the home is Heaven’s great law, and where violated, even if the parent be participator—as is but too often the case—the penalty comes, sooner or later; and if later, it comes with the interest added.

Do not understand me to say that childhood and youth should not evince life and spirit; a little too much of the vital element may be better than too little. Horses, restive, spirited, champing the bit, fiery, may run away and sometimes do mischief, but, nevertheless, a spirited, high-blooded horse brings more in the market than does a dull one. The

great problem of the home is how to train and to make the most of the spirited animal, the young man. Subjection and order may seem hard at the time. I have no doubt there are young men to whom these words come who would feel it a hardship to belong to a household where strict and rigid rule prevailed. Yet take care, dear friend—take care. The time may come when you will find that it would have been good for you to bear the yoke in your youth, that not to have been restrained was your sore misfortune, and that want of law has made you cease to be a law unto yourself, until you are ready to curse the day you were born.

If the history of these Sunday-night congregations, with the great numbers of young men who have gathered here for so many years, could be written, what a book it would make! How it would touch and thrill every reader's heart! One night some years since, after the benediction, I saw a young man standing in one of the aisles, evidently waiting for the minister. He was one, as I soon found, who had had good opportunities, though he had gone far astray. At this time he was depressed by the reaction from a "spree," and under this reaction he was ready to curse his bitter bondage—to curse himself and the day he was born—

and he was now reaching out for some hand to help him. He never was effectually helped. I attended his funeral afterward. He was a prodigal son who did not return.

HOME AS A SOURCE FOR MEMORIES AND IMPRESSIONS IN AFTER-LIFE.

We may say we are not authors and never expect to be, yet in a sense we are authors, all of us. We are producing volumes written on the leaves of our nature, and written with such ink that all the waves that beat upon them afterward cannot wash out the words. More indelible are they than Assyrian or Egyptian inscriptions. The tablets, too, readily receive impressions. The impressions made in the home, recording home scenes, home joys, home life in various phases, are conspicuous. Early memories proverbially are the strongest.

It has fallen to my lot to visit many lands. I have been from Finland to Africa and from the Jordan to beyond the Mississippi, but there is one little spot pictured on mind and heart which, after all, to the speaker has an interest found nowhere else. It is the house where he was born, and where home faces and forms, though long since gone, seem still to linger, and the farm in the neigh-

borhood where his early boyhood sports were enjoyed ; and when he returns there now, when long years have passed, the old scenes will come up again.

I say home as a source for memories and impressions for future life is a place altogether peculiar. I thank God that my early home was a well-regulated one—though it was motherless—and that there are no memories that bring shame in looking back to it. I trust it may be so with you, my young friends, when you come to have homes of your own, and, indeed, in the homes to which you now belong. I hope you will endeavor to contribute your share toward their good order and happiness, so that no sad memories shall haunt you in after-life.

It is wonderful how home impressions and home scenes do remain even when the moral nature has been corrupted. All are familiar with the bad habits of Robert Burns. Some of his most beautiful lines—some which shine with lustre in the galaxy of his remarkable land—owe their charm to the fact that in early childhood he had received the impressions of a religious household ; so that long afterward, when throwing himself away and comparatively worthless, there came up in “The

Cotter's Saturday Night" these bygone home scenes. Describing family prayer, the household gathered together before retiring for the night, he says :

"Then, kneeling down, to heaven's eternal King
The saint, the father and the husband prays :
Hope springs exulting on triumphant wing
That thus they all shall meet in future days,
There ever bask in uncreated rays,
No more to sigh or shed the bitter tear,
Together hymning their Creator's praise,
In such society yet still more dear,
While circling time moves round in an eternal sphere."

Prodigal as was this gifted man, he nevertheless drew his most effective pictures and his most touching memories from the Christian home.

Now a few suggestions as to

THE PRINCIPLES WHICH SHOULD PREVAIL IN THE HOME.

First, *mutual love*. The elder son in this house was probably amiable, considerate, ready to do kindnesses to all, deferential not only to superiors, but to equals, with a heart true, sincere and affectionate ; in fact, a good-principled, kindly, loving young man, quiet-mannered, perhaps, possibly not attract-

ing the stranger, for good, orderly people not unfrequently are very unobtrusive. But, different as the younger brother was, had he but possessed the heart of love, how changed would have been the family history !

Unselfishness ought to be another quality adorning the home. This trait in the first instance was conspicuous in the elder son. His readiness to let his brother rule the household and to lead his father into the course adopted was perhaps eminently unwise, but certainly was unselfish—a trait of character rare indeed, but very beautiful, putting to shame those who “look upon their own things” alone, and not “upon the things of others.” Truly, unselfish natures are a choice ornament. That was a beautiful compliment which I once heard a lady pay to a young man in this city. Speaking of him to me, she said, “He has the sweetest heart I ever knew.” Natures such as that make home happiness. Not manners nor dress nor accomplishments nor talent nor culture can do this, but “the sweetest heart one ever knew” can do it. The younger of these sons had a selfish heart. Neither claims of parents or of brother nor any other love could touch his cold, selfish nature. His main idea was self.

Desire for the general good, also, should be characteristic of home. Home is a sensitive little community, so compacted and so continuous that one member may seriously influence all. How do you make home attractive? By courtesy, kindness, considerateness, cheerfulness, lovingness, piety. But few elements, and they not costly, are requisite to make home the choicest place on earth. Let each, forgetting self, aim at the common good.

Contentment is another quality requisite to home enjoyment. The want of this was the difficulty with our prodigal. He was not satisfied, and did not intend to be. He was bent on leaving, and in this state of mind no doubt made himself particularly disagreeable. Now, nobody claims that the son must spend his whole life under the old roof. No; even were he so disposed, Providence would soon say to him, "Arise and depart; this is not your rest. Go out into the world and do your work. You are not to linger as a mere home-child, nursed and fed all your days." With some sons there is this unbecoming disposition to linger in idleness, living on what they have neither sown nor reaped nor gathered into barns. Such young men should be turned out of doors and compelled

to earn something. Our young gentleman was the reverse of this class. He did not wish to stay ; he would only be too glad to be gone. Home is too dull. Let him be free ; give him his money. How many counterparts there are to-day !

Piety, we need scarcely add, is a quality essential to the highest and best type of home. Whatever the other qualities, this exalts, sanctifies and crowns all. It sheds a heavenly radiance over all earthly good ; it combines in itself, indeed, the essence and surety of all real good. Were you selecting a residence for yourself and your family, if you had one, some things you would consider of great importance, such as good light, good air and a good outlook. What can so assure all these as the true, heartfelt, undefiled religion of the gospel ? This sincerely introduced and allowed its legitimate and benign place and sway, you will enjoy the best light, for it will emanate from the Sun of righteousness. It will assure the most healthful and vitalizing atmosphere, for "it is the Spirit which giveth life," and it will cheer and gladden the trusting soul with an outlook beyond the skies into its assured inheritance of blessedness and glory, "incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

Finally, the old home roof suggests our heaven-

ly Father's house on high, where his children may return to him after sad wanderings and find a sweet, sweet home where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.

THE PRODIGAL AND HIS PORTION.

"And he divided unto them his living."

LUKE xv. 12.

II.

THE PRODIGAL AND HIS PORTION.

ONE of the most critical periods in the life of a young man—not only in the life of a *young* man, but in that of any man—is when he comes into possession of property. If the amount be considerable, it at once brings him into collision with a powerful antagonism; for our Lord has said, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven!” The question is to be determined whether he shall possess riches or riches possess him; whether he is to rule, managing and controlling them and rendering them instruments for good, or they to control him and so carry him away as to imperil both his temporal and his eternal welfare. The misfortune is that to the young man often a very moderate amount, novice as he is in handling money, may seem a very large one; so that the temptations are as real and as formidable with a comparatively small amount as if it were a fortune.

The term "goods" in the text represents personal or movable estate, possessions of value, an inheritance greater or less. Wealth is a recognized power, occupying the forefront among the forces controlling social position, influence, commercial standing, and even official station. In our precocious land young adventurers dash into business and sometimes win a measure of success by boldness in taking risks such as a lifetime could not have achieved in the old-established way, and the possessor of a fortune which may have grown gradually often has his hold upon it increased as it has swollen in dimensions until nothing but death can relax his grasp.

The two parties to whom our attention will be directed are unlike those just referred to. The prodigal does not acquire his money by daring speculations, and the father does not hold on to his possessions with a tenacious grasp. Better for them both had these been their characteristics. The young man asks his as a gift, and the father in his yielding generosity gratifies the request, unreasonable though it be. The former, indeed, would not seem to have craved a fortune; perhaps this had never entered his thoughts. His tastes do not lie in that direction. He is not mercenary. He does not

look so much at getting a great amount as at having means to meet the expenses of his foreign travel. He wants money in hand, and he wants no one to restrain him—not even to caution him; a free foot and a free life and money to spend is his idea. Our young man, like many others, puts but little value on money on its own account—in fact, it is valued only as means to an end—so that when the objects craved are in prospect money is poured out like water. “Come easy, go easy,” is the principle of such; they squander it. An easy, unrestrained indulgence in what promises the desired gratification is the aim.

Our young man was of this sort. He had tired of the routine, dullness and restraint of the old home. He wanted a wider field, and one where there would lie more to interest, more excitement and more enjoyment—something, in short, more suited to a generous-hearted young man. He wanted a wider field and the means to reap its gratifications, and for this he wanted his “portion.”

We propose to consider at this time some of the particulars in this part of our young man’s history, taking as our topic, “The prodigal and his portion.” Notice, first,

THE CHERISHED DESIRE BECOMING A DEFINITE
PURPOSE.

This youth is going out of the old home into the wide world, with its bustle and stir, its pleasures and temptations. It will be a great change. Scarcely could there be a greater contrast than between the retirement, quiet uniformity of day after day in the home life, and the variety and excitement which await him in the "far-off land." His was somewhat the same experience as that of many young men of this day—not a few of whom hear my voice—who bid farewell to the uniform routine of country life to be thrown into the midst of the bustle, temptations and dangers of a city.

The step about to be taken by our young man was probably not a sudden thought. His was, no doubt, one of those dispositions which crave variety and excitement. His elder brother—perhaps phlegmatic and of a more uniform and quiet temperament—not only had no desire for the great world, but would have shrunk from it. Our hero wishes to "pitch in" and see what is to be seen, to enjoy what is to be enjoyed. The more of it, the better his taste is suited; "the more, the merrier." No; this thing of getting away is probably not a sudden

suggestion. Many a time has it been pondered ; so prominent and constantly in his mind has it been that he might at last have said, "It has been one of my day-dreams." One of his day-dreams ! He longed to get away from home. The echoes of the far-off world had reached his ears and fired his fancy. The imagination pictured an ideal world ; he longed for the hour when the picture should become a reality. He might, indeed, take himself off without asking his father's consent ; he might leave the family to wake up some morning and discover that he was nowhere to be found. Days and weeks might pass, and they would hear nothing to throw light on the mystery ; his disappearance might become the neighborhood talk. Such a course he might have taken, but this did not suit his ideas. He had too much pride for that, and, though he was destined in course of time to return with empty pockets, he did not care to set out in that impecunious state. He wanted to go as a gentleman, and must have the outfit and provision suited to that character. He must have money. Some one might have suggested, if cognizant of his plans, that if he wanted money he had better go and make it : "Go to work ; do something for yourself. Do anything but a mean thing. Go

put your hand to the plough ; go dig. Show that you have something in you, and that you can make your own way." But this does not suit the high notions of our young man ; he is too self-indulgent for that—too indolent, too proud.

Some who now hear my voice perhaps have also been longing to escape from the dull old home, and to get out into the stirring, driving world—the world of excitement and pleasure, the beautiful and varied world. It has been the one thing haunting the imagination and kindling the longings. You have been waiting for that day, and it has come ; now you have it. This is your first season in a large city. Take care that it is not the season that introduces you into the first chapter of the prodigal's experience.

Our prodigal must have money at once. The expectation of inheriting a portion of the father's estate will not suffice ; that is too uncertain and too far off. Elder sons in England may negotiate large advances upon an estate coming to them at the father's death, but such things were not in practice in the prodigal's days. Perhaps the latter would not have broken his heart with grief had the head of the household departed this life. It is not an impossible thing even now that the young

man inclined to be fast reflects not unfrequently on the possibilities of the "old man's" being removed from this world. It may even be that some become almost impatient that he lingers so long. It is hard to fix a limit to the outrageous conceptions of a young man whose heart is fully set on "reveling, banquetings and abominable" indulgences. To be forecasting the time when a venerable father's head shall be laid in the grave, so that the son may have a portion of his estate, would not be creditable to a young man setting himself up to be a gentleman, nor to any young man. The prodigal is not exactly guilty of this, but he escapes it only by a proposition to the father to put him in possession at once of whatever portion would be coming to him when the head of the house is dead and buried ; provided he can have the money, he will not wish anything to happen to the "old man."

Possibly some who are not regarded as prodigals and would be far from recognizing themselves in that light allow themselves sometimes to sum up what would be their benefit from the decease of the "old man." In case the subject should be referred to, such a son would not express himself explicitly ; it would rather be intimated that there would be

something considerable coming to him some day. But how much is in that "some day"! How little sons realize the debt they owe to the "old man"! But for the "old man's" prudence and good management, how would the son have fared? Where would he have been to-day? What his present circumstances? What his prospects for the future? It is not fair to be speculating on the possible length of the "old man's" days; it is not fair to divide his estate before the will has been put on record. But our prodigal will not submit to uncertain delays; he will "cut the Gordian knot" at once by putting on a bold face and demanding the portion which will be coming to him.

Too much is it the custom with sons of successful families to be waiting for their portion of the father's fortune, when they should be striving to make their own. The young man ought to step out into the world's busy arena and say, "By the help of God, I will try to do something for myself. I will do with my own strong arm what I find opportunity to do. If I cannot do the part I desire, I will do what I can; I will do anything rather than dawdle away my days waiting till the 'old man' dies." A true young manhood will

find in the world a wide field of opportunity. Even though places may not open to others, this need be no discouragement to you; they may open to you if you try. "All things are possible to him that willeth." I could give instances where young men have come to Baltimore, and, following right in the tracks of those who have "found no place," but reported all doors closed, have persevered and found employment, and are standing well to-day, thriving and valued in the houses where they were merely on trial at the outset. A self-made man is often the best type of man; he has not been brought up in the nursery. Thrown on his own resources, he has been compelled to make his way over obstacles and discouragements which might well startle and appall the inexperienced. But he conquered them one after another until he stands master of the field.

In great cities, whose names rank highest at the bank-board? Whose names are transmitted on business signs long after the individuals themselves are dead, because of their having founded the house? They were not men born in luxury; they had not received in advance their portion of their fathers' estate; perhaps their fathers had no estate. Who were George Peabody, Johns

Hopkins—both of whom have sat in these pews—and others whose names might be mentioned, whose monuments in the noble institutions they have founded are the pride of our city and more than ever entitle her to her favorite designation, “The Monumental City”? Theirs was in every eminent degree a self-made history. Referring to their earlier days, they might have adopted the language of the apostle Paul: “These hands have ministered to my necessities.” But poverty and the absence of advantages did not dampen their enterprise and energy, and their extraordinary success and the immortal lustre they have shed upon their names are but samples of what many times has been achieved by industry, economy, perseverance and discretion in this extraordinary land where our lot is cast. In what almost startling contrast with such as these are young men who, like the prodigal, are relying upon their portion of the fathers’ goods, and whose highest ambition is a full purse and a free field for sensual gratifications and pleasures!

This was a bold fellow, this young prodigal. He could not wait for the “old man” to be laid in his grave. That might be a long way off; indeed, it might never come: the “old man” might outlive him. So he makes up his mind to put on a bold

face and to demand from the father the portion which some day would be coming to him. And how much a bold face does accomplish!—often more than talent. Strange how human nature shrinks and yields before self-assertion! Yes, confidence carries the day; it is the triumph of audacity.

Some fathers, indeed, wrong their children by not giving them, when they are well able to do so, what is almost indispensable in helping them to help themselves. As a result the son is kept loitering around home when he should be out finding his place in the world. One of the worst things which can happen to a young man is hanging around home with nothing to do. But some fathers are so covetous and so narrow and have so little far-seeing consideration for their sons that they are not willing to lend them a helping hand, even though favoring circumstances occur and though comparatively little would be required; and when the help does come in the course of nature, it comes too late, for the son, spite of the failure to help him, and spurred to greater energy by that circumstance, has gone into the field and won success for himself; so that when “the portion of goods” does at last reach him he does not need it.

But our young man's purpose in seeking a portion was not to enter upon an honorable pursuit. It was not that he wished to help himself in the busy toils of life; he is not helping himself, and does not expect to. He is bent on self-indulgence, and the two things he is now after are money to pay for it and a field where he can have full and unrestrained opportunity.

One of the unfavorable characteristics of our day is the

DECLINE OF THE OLD-FASHIONED REVERENCE for fathers and mothers, and it augurs badly for the future. Respect and reverence for years, and especially for parents, are first-class elements of character. To set aside their sweet, beautiful influence and lose their wholesome effects tends to undermine the whole future, and to bring failure and disaster where there might have been success; and this sapping the foundations does not promise favorably either for Church or for State. In no country under the sun can there be found such precocity run mad as in our own. The Declaration of Independence seems to have been transferred from the political field to the family circle, until children exhibit a spirit of independence and self-assertion

in striking contrast with the pleasing and wholesome subordination characteristic of other countries. The costliness and fashion in dress, the indulgence in fashionable amusements and the society manners and airs are often painful to behold.

A few years since, when at the seashore, I saw a little girl of this class whirling in the round dance night after night until a late hour, and on going to Saratoga afterward I saw her whirling there; and when, after two weeks, I took my departure, I left her going round and round. Though this was possibly an extreme case, yet the tendency to such neglect of right training is but too obviously a characteristic of the day, and from such households it would be only natural that there should go forth prodigal sons. Very possibly our prodigal had not been restrained at home. At any rate, we know that home was too narrow a sphere for him; nothing less than the wide world would suffice.

Still, one would think that even with all the self-assertion and boldness of this young fellow he could not but have had some doubt of the success of his application, and perhaps it was with some trepidation that he introduced the subject. He might possibly have relied on the effect of a bold stroke, saying, "Father, I have come to speak on a

subject I have been thinking of for some time. I am getting to an age when I ought not to be treated as a child, and ought to be allowed some privileges. I have had no opportunity to see anything of the world, and I don't think I could be satisfied to spend my life here. I wish, therefore, you would just provide for me and let me go. To be plain, give me the portion that will be coming to me from your estate." Surely it was an audacious proposal. There was no need for his being kept in leading-strings at home always—that would not be best—but there is a wrong way of doing even a right thing.

Then, as to seeing the world, at a proper time and in the right way it may be good for young people to see the world. If the youth had only asked that he might take a journey and see something of the world, this would not have been unreasonable. The world contains much that may be learned to advantage. Astronomically viewed, it may seem a small world, but regarded from the standpoint of our limited experiences it is a vast world—vast in fields for exploration and research, vast in intellectual and moral capacities, vast in nature, art, commerce, trade, and in innumerable varieties of activity and interest. It educates one to "see the world," for education is not acquired

simply from books and schools: it comes largely from practical observation and intercourse with men and things; so that under proper restrictions it is sometimes wise to have a young man see the world. But let him not spend time and money in Paris and other gay capitals of Europe, seeing the things which he ought not to see and leaving unseen the things which he should see. Let him see the world in a reasonable and proper manner, and then come home to work. It is a great exposure and trial to a young man to be away from the restraints of home and to be thrown into the fascinations and snares of a foreign city. Wonderful that so many escape unharmed!

Let us look next at our young man in his

UNEXPECTED SUCCESS.

The abundant satisfaction and gratulations of the young fellow, no doubt, were quite conspicuous. He could not have looked for such success, so prompt and so complete—leave to go and money to pay the way. He has all he could have asked. The day-dreams which had so haunted him are about to be realized. The far-off land whose echoes had so fascinated him he is to see with his own eyes; its pleasures and varied attractions he

may himself enjoy. What he had pictured of life in the great crowded cities he may now share in reality. He can hardly believe it; it seems too good to be true. But the money is actually in hand, and all will soon be ready for the start. He is absorbed with the prospect. Actually getting ready to depart from this dull old place! Getting ready to launch out into the great world!

Yes, the important step is about to be taken. Oh how important the step that takes a young man over the threshold of his home to encounter the novelties, the temptations, the sins, possibly the disaster and wreck, which form a part of the great world! How much depends upon that first step! What a history begins at this point! How interesting and cheering sometimes! How painful and sorrowful at others!

The value of the portion received is not stated; no doubt it was considerable. The father evidently was a man well to do, and what he would have left the son at his death is now paid over to him—in what particular shape we can only conjecture. It could not have been real estate; it could not have been the stock on the farm, nor the cattle grazing in the hill-country: these were not portable. Though there were no bills of exchange nor drafts

nor express companies, nor any of the means for transmitting funds common at this day, there must have been some conveniences for this purpose in that halcyon period of the great Roman empire, of which Palestine formed a part. But, whatever may have been the precise shape the "portion" has assumed so that it may be used by the young man in his travels, it is his, under his unrestricted control, and will lie ready for him to use in his anticipated adventures and pleasures. Poor fellow! little did he realize that the wealth he was so proud to call his own was to prove a heavy weight to sink him in seas of trouble. One of the worst things which can happen to an inexperienced young man is to come suddenly into possession of an estate in such shape that it can readily be turned into money.

Pausing at this point in our hero's history, let us now characterize his conduct.

1. It was *unfeeling and selfish*. He may have counted himself a young man of honor; he may even have declared that he would part with life sooner than part with honor; but where is honor now? Where is respect for age? Where is veneration for venerable character? Where is the ordinary deference due from son to father? Where is anything but a cold, selfish, unfeeling, hard heart?

No matter what inconvenience his course may occasion, or how much heartache and sorrow his waywardness may bring upon all in the house, what does he care? He is looking out for himself. How selfishness blinds the mind! How it debases the soul, destroying its finer sensibilities! The prodigal is fully set on taking off his share of the family wealth and enjoying it as he sees fit, no matter if the reduced estate should occasion inconvenience. What is that to him? So not unfrequently in our day there are members of a family who will have their own selfish gratifications, no matter how others may be affected. They will spend money, although money may be wanted for ordinary comforts, or even for necessities. They will indulge the appetite with the cup which steals away honor and happiness and debases soul and body, no matter who suffers or what may be the consequences. "Give me my portion!" is their cry. Yes, and let the portion be large, no matter at whose expense. How the sinner goes in for indulging his appetite and passions, regardless of the trouble it brings or upon whom, though it break the wife's heart, though it bring the dear old mother's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave, though the venerable father, with weeping eyes be-

holding his poor prodigal, exclaim, "Would God I had died for thee, my boy!" or "Would God thou hadst died and I had followed thee in childhood to thy grave!"

2. This young man's course was *presumptuous and arrogant*. "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." This is the divine statute regulating the conduct of children to parents, and almighty God has affixed to it the incentive, "that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Do we not sometimes see how literally this is verified—that disrespect and disobedience to parents do shorten life, that they lead to a disposition, character and habits so detrimental to health and long life that the evil-doers do not live out half their days? Disobeying and dishonoring parents have proved the implements to lay them in an untimely grave. How often is it illustrated that compliance with the father's and the mother's faithful instructions would have been the salvation of the son for this world as well as for the world to come! Parental restraint is wholesome. It is God's appointed way for curbing the young and the inexperienced; it is the divine method of training in their tender and

formative period the mind and the soul for a blessed immortality ; it is the Heaven-ordained school where are taught by loving hearts from experience the lessons of life. What folly to despise such instructions ! how audacious !

3. The early conduct of this young man cannot but prove *the seed of a fruitful crop of sin*. With such tastes, with freedom and with money, it requires no philosopher to stand at this early point of his history and work out the sequel. Given these three things—freedom from restraint, abundance of money and a lustful nature—and you can predict the end.

In conclusion, let me counsel young men to accept the conditions ordained by divine Providence for their life. Though in your youthful days you do not like to be restrained, to be curbed where you would enjoy liberty, learn that “it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.” The yoke may appear heavy, but you may live to bless God that he laid it upon you. It saved you and prepared you to be a man. Learn, also, that to break over the bounds which Providence has ordained for the family is to trample upon your own holiest advantages. How much some of us have to thank the old home for ! How, after years have rolled

away and gray hairs have appeared, its scenes come back with tenderness and power ! How the motherless family circle gathers once more, as if summoned by some magic wand from the long-gone past ! How the venerable father appears again, with the "old family Bible that lay on the stand" open before him, reading the words of life ! and how he kneels with his motherless children, commending them to God as his Saviour and theirs !

I thank God that I did not go off as a prodigal son, and I wish you, young men, likewise to avoid this peril ; and, though you may, many of you, be far from the restraints of home and amidst the temptations and dangers of a great city, remember the pious home circle ; remember the prayers offered for you ; remember the hand that was laid on your head with Heaven's benediction. Though as regards home you are in "a far-off land," do not be a prodigal son.

THE PRODIGAL ENJOYING HIMSELF.

*“And not many days after the younger son gathered all together,
and took his journey into a far country.”*

LUKE xv. 13.

III.

THE PRODIGAL ENJOYING HIMSELF.

A WILLFUL, wayward son is a sad drawback to the comfort of a family. No matter how favored otherwise, no matter what the attractions of the home, how ample the means, how large the circle of friends, how high the social position, no matter what their intelligence, taste, culture, and no matter how sincere the religious faith and hope, if there be one of the number whose temper is intractable, who has little sympathy with the home life, who seeks his enjoyments elsewhere, who keeps bad hours and is restive under restraint and longing to break away,—the fact of such a member in the family is a serious drawback to comfort. It is the “fly which spoils the apothecary’s ointment.” It is the shadow which lies dark and heavy across the hearthstone.

How often such shadows do lie across hearthstones!—oftener than the community around, even friends and near neighbors, know. Indications

there may be that things are not as comfortable as they should be ; but if this be true, it is kept so quiet that no one can really say it is so. The parents are careful not to show that they are in trouble, though it is hard to keep the lips closed and to wear a cheerful smile and to show an interest in neighborhood affairs when there is a disturbance in home harmony, a skeleton in the house. Alas ! such experiences are not rare in this disordered, troubled world. How thoroughly and instantaneously the tone of conversation would be changed did the head of the troubled household tell in some social circle what disquietude pervaded his once harmonious, peaceful home, how things had assumed a serious aspect, how they were getting worse instead of better, and how relief seemed quite hopeless !

For some time before, it must have been obvious in the home of the prodigal that all was not right. His want of interest in family affairs, his restlessness, impatience and general ugliness of disposition, but too plainly told the story. Human nature then and now are the same. What it produces in one age it produces in another ; so that in all families from the same conditions there will be the same results. We have here, as we have said, a general

ugliness of disposition. There would be also, no doubt, frequent absences, unaccounted for or covered over with improbable explanations—in plain language, lies—his associates and his occasionally excited and unnatural appearance only too plainly telling the tale, and bringing the sad consciousness that to their little family is coming the terrible trial of a wayward, dissipated boy. No doubt they have struggled hard not to believe it, putting the best interpretation on suspicious conduct and making the most of the slightest favorable indications, but the time comes when they can close their eyes no longer, and the sad truth has to be admitted that the boy who had been—in part, at least—their hope and pride is taking counsel with the ungodly or standing in the way of sinners or sitting in the seat of the scornful.

In the case before us it is by no means probable that the demand for the portion of goods with a view of leaving home was an instantaneous suggestion. It was, no doubt, the outcome of what had long been brewing; it was the culmination of irregularities which had been becoming more and more conspicuous. And now the sad fact is only too true that the demand has been made and acceded to; that the father, whether judiciously or in-

judiciously, has yielded, that the living has been divided and the disobedient boy put in possession of his patrimony. Let us turn our attention first to the

PREPARATIONS FOR LEAVING.

According to the text, there was no time lost: "Not many days after." The young man was so anxious to go and had been so long restive that when once the opportunity was given and the means secured you could not suppose he would tarry; so that as expeditiously as possible he gathers all together and makes ready for departure. He will be only too glad to bid farewell to the old home. However reluctant and tardy he may have been where privilege and duty were concerned, when there is a prospect of self-indulgence and pleasure, of liberty to do as he pleases, he is up and stirring, full of energy and life, eager to be off.

But, friends, he does not stand alone. His is not a solitary instance of the characteristic to which we have referred—where men are slow to listen to the demands of duty, but prompt, active, enterprising, at the calls of selfishness and pleasure. How slow, for instance, men are to do God's will! how, when the great Father of us all comes near and speaks

to us, calling us to duty and to privilege—indeed, to the very primary obligation of all, that of admitting him to the supreme place in the heart—how we make excuses! how we delay and hesitate and at last postpone indefinitely—perhaps, as it proves, for ever! But when we have the opportunity to gratify our own selfish ends, then there is no delay; then we are at once on the wing, and the moment for action cannot come too soon. When duty and self-gratification come into collision, generally the latter wins. So this young man, inspirited by his heart's desire, departs “not many days after.” Notice, too,

THE COMPLETENESS OF HIS CLEARING OUT.

He made ready thoroughly. When gathering up his goods, whatever they may have been, he made what might be called “a clean sweep.” He left nothing: “he gathered *all* together.” Not part, not that which would serve him best in the far-off land, not merely what was most convenient, perhaps with the addition of some pet things or such things as he would not care to have come under the father's eye, not merely what, perhaps, one would imagine he would take: he took “all.” His selfish, grasping heart would not leave a fragment. How mean

is sin ! You may sometimes picture the enjoyments it affords, its banquets of sensual good, and you regard it as a glorious thing just to have unrestrained privilege, with none to molest or make one afraid. But you do not know how mean sin is. Next Sunday night we may see how mean it was to the prodigal when it had gotten him off into a far-off land ; how it showed that there is another side to the subject ; how it deluded and cheated him first, then disenchanted and mocked him afterward.

The prodigal gathered his all together, and was going with a purpose to stay. He had had enough of this old house, this strict regimen, this dull routine, the father's eye and the elder brother's demureness. These things did not suit a spirited young fellow like himself ; he was going where he could have things in a different way. He believed people had a right to enjoy themselves in this world ; he didn't believe in long faces and sanctimoniousness.

How truly this parable pictures human nature ! How it reflects back from bygone ages the human heart working as it does now ! How much is condensed within this parable in regard to that strange thing human nature—its ignorance of its own highest good and its perverse, persistent pursuit of what

can bring only disappointment and trouble ! How with one accord men by nature strive to get away from God ! How uniformly, when left to themselves, they take the substance the Father gives them—intelligence, the moral faculty, spiritual capacity, in short, an immortal soul, with whatever of this world's possessions may be theirs—everything, indeed—and straightway take themselves far away from the Author of all their mercies, the God in whose hands their breath is and whose are all their ways ! He has great blessings to bestow ; his benediction will bring with it all that is best for man here below and an imperishable weight of glory beyond the grave. But do men seek these blessings ? Do they even accept them when offered and pressed ? Is it their preference to be among the family of God on earth ? No ; like the prodigal, they take their portion of goods and journey off to seek satisfaction in a sinful world. How needful the admonition of the apostle, “ Take heed lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God ” ! Sinners have no congeniality with God ; they do not wish to be where God's presence is. If he does not depart from them, they will depart from him.

Next let us look at the prodigal as he is

OFF FOR THE JOURNEY.

Had this young man been setting out to seek his fortune in some reputable way, even then so important a step as that which was supposed to sever him permanently from residence in the household would have caused no little pain. The family, however, would have looked upon it as one of those events which in the nature of things must be expected, and they would encourage themselves with the thought that the sacrifice they were making was for his good—that perhaps a kind Providence would open his way to success, so that they might live to see him occupy a position of prominence and influence for which they would be abundantly thankful. But when a son leaves home with no such aspirations, with no purpose to engage in reputable pursuits, but solely to take his pleasure, it cannot but be matter of serious concern as to the final outcome. In case he should be spared to return how will he appear? What effect will his world-experience have had on him? Will it have made him wiser or worse? Will he come back to them prosperous and confided in, in every way changed for the better, or will he return with the freshness of youth replaced by the debasing evidences of a dissolute

and sensual career, causing the hearts that loved him to sink like lead within the bosom as the first look discloses the transformation sin has made?

Had our young man possessed the nature of some, we might have pictured him, when the last morning came, taking the last look at the many familiar things associated with his home life from the dawn of memory—the room which went by his name, articles of various kinds he had gathered together, gifts received on birthdays or festival occasions, possibly some of the implements of his boyish sports stored where they were placed when the consciousness arrived that he must put away childish things. Possibly even our insensate young man could not have been touched by the last look at these tokens of what were now to be more than ever by-gones. Then come those other last things—the last night he is to sleep under the old roof, the last meal, the last embrace, the last sad word, “Farewell.” How many a mother’s heart has been wrung with anguish by such partings with her boy, with regard to whom she felt that there was more to fear than to hope, and how even the old father’s furrowed cheeks have run down with tears as with stammering lips he tried to speak the parting blessing! Our poor heartless, selfish youth may have been

moved to tears in the leavetaking. Even hardened sinners steeped in sin sometimes give evidence that beneath all their guilt and corruption there are tender places in their hearts. Sometimes those who have been long years plunged in dissipation and vice, until you would think there could not be

“A rose of the wilderness left on the stock
To tell where the garden had been,”

when kindly approached in their sober, rational moments show the tenderness of a little child. They will tell you, too, that the first step in the downward road which has brought them to what they are was the step out of the old home.

As the prodigal moves off and waves the last adieu, he takes his farewell view of the home with its inmates gazing after him, and turns to meet new scenes and make an eventful chapter in his history. That one step changes everything. He leaves all he has been familiar with; henceforth all will be new and strange. His connections and associates have been honorable and respectable; he must find new ones now: what will these be? He has been accustomed to a regular, quiet routine, with the wholesome restraints of a well-regulated family. These were proper and for the welfare of the house-

hold, and they were enforced. Good moral conduct, respect for the Sabbath, attendance on religious services, were no doubt required. Now things are to be different. From the moment he steps into the wide, wide world the fixed regimen ceases. No father, no mother, no well-known friends, control him. He is his own master, free to do as he will, go where he will, associate with whom he will and enjoy himself as he will. So you see that between the inside of the old home and the outside there is a vast difference. He is not only without the restraints to which he has been accustomed, but he is where he must form his own plans and decide for himself what he is to do.

This stepping out into the great world and being so completely and so suddenly thrown upon one's self makes a great change. It is a crisis. How important are right influences for young men fresh from their homes thrown into the heart of a great city! Deprived as they are of home surroundings, they need special counsel in the house of God—should be made to feel that they are thought of and cared for.

FASCINATIONS OF THE FAR COUNTRY.

The text does not state what was the "far country" to which the prodigal went. You and I can

readily tell where we should probably have gone had we lived in that day and land and been setting off on a similar errand. All-conquering Rome was then in the midst of her glory. Tiberius Cæsar was on the throne with the world prostrate at his feet. The Imperial City sat in regal splendor on her seven hills, adorned and enriched with the spoils of her widespread victories. Canaan was one of the subjugated and tributary provinces. As there was necessarily constant intercourse with the Imperial City, what so natural as that a young man athirst for worldly pleasures should make his way thither? Had he done so, he would have been fascinated with the first visions of the centre of the great empire. The Bay of Naples and Vesuvius were as bewitching as now, and Herculaneum and Pompeii, not yet buried beneath ashes and lava, stood arrayed in that exquisite taste and beauty whose relics the world admires and imitates to-day. Judging from the unspeakably depraved habits of their inhabitants, illustrated by the relics in bronze and stone and fresco still remaining, these cities would have been a paradise for a young man such as our prodigal on his first errand after sensual pleasures. The foretastes at these way-stations would have prepared him for the loaded banquet-

tables of the Imperial City, into whose bosom a conquered world had poured her treasures and her vices. What wonder and delight must have thrilled an unsophisticated young man fresh from a quiet country life when the uplifted curtain disclosed the mistress of the world amid her dazzling glories!—temples, palaces, triumphal arches, rising from amidst vistas of streets rich in architecture and art, theatres and amphitheatres, chiefest among them the grand Coliseum with its eighty thousand spectators, including emperors, nobles, warriors, statesmen, orators, the wealth and the beauty of the world's capital, gazing with enthusiasm and with shouts of rapturous applause at the contests of gladiators with wild beasts and with one another in the bloody arena.

Amid this great carnival of sense and sin what must be the surprise and enchantment of an inexperienced young man upon whom all this bursts with the charm and force of novelty! How he wonders that all the world is not flocking hither! How open he is to the first whisper of temptation! How swift his unaccustomed, unguarded feet to run into evil! How the siren's voice is transformed into fascinating music and the house of shame into a palace of delight! How readily he falls into the

fowler's snare ! How first acquaintances—on which so much depends—are those devil's scouts ever on the watch for fresh victims ! How readily he is introduced to what in his credulity he accepts as choice society—the flashy gentry where the wine flows free and games are exciting and betting runs high, or where gaudy women appear in the audacious abandon of the lascivious dance ! To such a one as our prodigal this would have seemed Elysium indeed. All that imagination had pictured has fallen short of the reality. The patrimony received from his father supplies the needful means, and without delay he is borne away on the tide of enchantment.

Perhaps, young friends, some of you coming from rural homes have been thrown into temptations in their way as fascinating and dangerous to you. Posters, pictorial and otherwise, have greeted you almost from your arrival with solicitations to spectacular displays, incentives and excipients to immorality and vice, recruiting-agencies for corruption and for hell. Even, indeed, in private mansions, amid festal scenes, unsophisticated eyes, unused to the mazes of the waltz, might be startled by the familiarities, the embraces, the equivocal postures, between the sexes. Had such liberties been taken

in your rural region, there would have been trouble in the house.

One of the circumstances ministering to the peril of young men coming to a strange city is that they are unknown. Not a few persons who fain would go into sin are restrained by the fact that they are well known, and that too much is at stake, as to employment, prospects and good name, for them to run the risk of being blackened by discovery in vicious indulgences or amid depraved associations. But for the young man who comes a stranger to a strange city there can be no such protective policy. Who knows him? Who cares for him? Who would concern themselves as to whether he does good or evil? How important that virtue and religion should seek out the friendless young stranger and show him kindness and strive to help him on in every good way! How admirable and needful a work Young Men's Christian Associations may accomplish! How worthy are they of the talent and the most influential co-operation in the wide field they are designed to occupy!

The only other attraction in the "far-off land" which we mention is that there is no fastidiousness or scruple. Conscience is not to be spoken

of; the only thing to be avoided is sanctimoniousness, narrow-mindedness. You must not talk on certain subjects, such as dying or the possibilities of another world or the judgment-day, or you must learn, in case these should be mentioned, to treat them patronizingly, or perhaps humorously. I have sometimes seen in newspaper notices of contests of agility the newly-devised term "go-as-you-please." Well, that is the idea in the prodigal's life of pleasure—go as you please; think as you please; speak as you please; do as you please; enjoy yourself as you please. This is the usage in the far-off land. I once heard a man who had spent much time in Paris say, "Paris is the most natural place in the world." He meant that things are on the "go-as-you-please" system. Put up the brakes, crowd on the steam and drive ahead. It is a down-grade all the way.

I conclude with a few inferences.

1. Leaving the parental roof is a step which no young man should take without considering the responsibilities and possible consequences. Where Providence in the shape of necessity or wise enterprise indicates the movement, the way is clear; but if a young man proposes to leave his home simply because he wishes a free foot and liberty to "enjoy"

himself as he sees fit, he had better pause before taking the step. He may find to his shame and sorrow, when too late, that on crossing the home threshold he left behind not only the truest and best friends he was ever to know, but also purity, honor, respectability and all that makes life worth living.

2. The conditions under which a young man bids farewell to home often furnish a good criterion whereby to foretell his future. If for duty, for improvement, for honorable pursuits, to do something in life, to make a man of himself, then we may augur favorably ; but if his motive be to escape wholesome restraint and to enjoy his pleasures, then no good need be anticipated. It will be but the old story over again, the prodigal son re-enacted with the prodigal's penitence and successful return left out. Many a young man leaving his home to seek his fortune and to make his way in the world has won a noble success. Nothing can be more commendable than for one with no cheering prospects and no hand to help, relying only upon himself and upon his God, to go into the world's great field and carve for himself fortune, honor, fame and usefulness.

3. Apparent triumph over obstacles which stand

in the way of gratifying wishes, though seemingly a success, often proves a disappointment and disaster. The first experiences were, no doubt, all the prodigal anticipated, and more. But his pleasures were to prove "a prelude to his pains;" they were but the devil's bait to lure him into sin, sorrow and shame. Ordinarily a father's judgment is far safer than a young man's freaks and fancies. Ponder his words.

4. Finally, leaving our heavenly Father's gracious, loving home is by nature the discredit of us all. In this particular we all stand in the same category. "We have all gone astray." Each has gone his own way, but all have left the paths of righteousness and peace. Thanks be to God, if we have returned as penitent prodigals, we have found the door open and are once more happy in the Father's love!

GATHERING CLOUDS.

“And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.”

LUKE xv. 15.

IV.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

JUDGING from a casual and superficial view of this young man's condition, he would have been considered one of the favored. Had he lived in this day and come as a stranger into one of our communities, he would probably have received attention and have been treated with consideration. It is fair to presume that he was not lacking in education and manners. He had enjoyed the advantages of people in good circumstances. He had money. Why should not the doors be open to him? Possibly his society was sought for; possibly he could have married well. Though after a while there might have been "irregularities" in his way of life, though some even spoke of him as "a fast young man," yet how easily such things are condoned, and how many will be ready to look on the best side and to say that "he is only sowing his wild oats," that after marrying he will give this up and settle down, a steady, substantial man!

But such anticipations were not destined to be realized in this case—at least, not as suggested—nor are they often realized in similar cases now. There is such a thing as venturing too far toward the brink of the cataract, and, even though there may be a struggle to stem the force of the water and escape, the current is too violent and the victim is carried over. Young men who will take counsel of appetite and passion, and will enjoy themselves in what the world terms pleasure, may turn a deaf ear to the faithful, friendly warnings, may close their eyes to the risks and perils of their course, but this does not avert the consequences. Those who sow seed should expect a harvest, and those who sow in the fields of sin and vice will assuredly gather their harvest. Sooner or later they will return bringing their sheaves with them, and sorrowful sheaves will they be. Our young man, with his ardent, willful nature, his freedom to do as he pleases, his hankering for the pleasures of sin, the opportunities and constant temptations to indulgence, and his as yet abundant means to meet the expenses of this never economical life, had dashed into the arena with an abandon probably rarely surpassed even in the far-off land. That this could not last long was sufficiently obvious.

"The pleasures of sin," says the Bible, "are but for a season;" and when prosecuted with such "excess of riot," the crisis must be hastened, so that after pouring out his money in "riotous living" and keeping company with "harlots," we are not surprised to read that he "had spent all and began to be in want."

We come now to notice the prodigal in his changed condition. Our subject will be the prodigal's

TRoubles IN THE FAR COUNTRY.

1. How great the change coming over his experience! At the outset his was a hilarious life. The field was wide and spread open before him, with none to molest. Why should he not have a "good time"? And he did. He may have written glowing descriptions to some friend of his own age, pitying him in his dull, humdrum life and painting in glowing colors festive scenes which were an every-day thing with him.

But, after all, we are so constituted that the soul will sometimes sit in judgment upon itself. Our Creator has erected a tribunal within which decides questions of right and wrong—a tribunal before which, when summoned, we cannot but put in appearance, and before which the guilty one must

perform the unwelcome duty of arraigning, convicting and condemning himself. The prodigal, for instance, after having exhausted some scene of dissipation and debauchery, becomes thoughtful. Memory recalls the past—his strikingly better training, the comparative innocence of his former life in contrast with these days and nights of sin—and the question will arise, “Is this riotous way the best way? Will it pay in the long run? Is it wise?” Accustomed as he has been to moral and religious surroundings and with the impressions of faithful home teachings still unobliterated, it is impossible but that serious reflection will come; and as memory recalls the old home people he cannot but ask himself what they would think if they knew all this.

But such thoughts are disturbing; it will not do to indulge them unless he is ready to change his kind of life. So long as this continues, the less of such thinking, the more comfort. The world, too, has its pleasures; why shouldn't he enjoy his share? Now, when he is young, is the time; after a while, when the zest of youth has passed, when he has become satiated, he will settle down.

2. There are certain other *sequences of sinful pleasures* which the prodigal probably would not

relish. The constitution of his nature, even physically, plays an important rôle in this serious life-drama. The principle of compensation obtains as to both the moral and the physical being. Where there has been waste, there must be repair; where the drafts upon the store of health and vigor have been excessive, the diminished capital must be replaced, or suffering or bankruptcy and ruin will ensue. Go on with the drafts, and the dreaded settling-day will come. Yes, it is a law of man's nature that if he exacts beyond a rational measure he will surely suffer for it. The reaction must come when he has been straining and pushing matters to an extreme. Indeed, there is a twofold compensation involved—the moral and the physical; for it is not only self-condemnation and remorse which come upon the stage as the after-piece to the revel and debauch—the self-reproach, the self-contempt and the disgust—but it is the entire physical nature disturbed, nerves unstrung, and with these everything unstrung, the entire organization out of harmony—no normal, healthful action, but *ennui*, headache, indigestion, the flushed face and the hot, feverish tongue. Body and soul on the rack, often the poor victim wishes he were dead, and often at this stage in the sad and humiliating experience,

poor creature! with his own hand he puts an end to his miserable days:

“Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world.”

Friends, is this what you call pleasure? If so, deliver me from a life of pleasure. Pleasure may have its enticing draughts at first, but in the bottom of the cup there are wormwood and gall. Yes,

“Each pleasure hath its poison too,
And every sweet a snare.”

Is it strong drink and the wine-cup? Hear the word of God: “Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine. . . . At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.” Is it the “strange woman”? “Let not thine heart,” saith the wise man, “incline unto her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded; yea, strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.”

Possibly—probably—when the reaction had come or in sober, serious moments, such as must sometimes visit even the dissipated and dissolute, our

poor prodigal may have asked himself, "Would it not have been better to have stayed in the old home? Would it not have been better to have taken life rationally, to have enjoyed its comforts and satisfactions quietly?" This question, upon the whole, perhaps he decides affirmatively; for he cannot altogether blot out the remains of early teachings.

3. It is obvious that the society the prodigal is in *will not bear close scrutiny*. He cannot but see this. However blinded by the witcheries of what may have seemed free life at the outset, he must sooner or later discover that underneath the thin outside covering is corruption. At first the society was most agreeable—so different from the dullness of his old associates, so free, so cultivated, so manly, so generous. How ignorant he has been! How many things they know! But he will soon learn. Yes, he will surely learn much, and no little to his sorrow. As he becomes more familiar with the circle of these young men of the world, some of the varnish and glitter wears off, and he begins to have an inkling of what is underneath. He discovers that this sort of society is not remarkable for principle and high-toned honor. In fact, there are those who at the outset he had thought to be generous, who were ready to take him by the hand, introduce him to their

friends, "show him round," and who were constantly telling him of their wealth, their having more money than they knew what to do with, who now do not hesitate to "sponge" on him, to propose entertainments and leave him to pay the score, to enjoy his "treats" and never reciprocate. Or if they do occasionally entertain him, it is always "for a purpose," as at the rich table at the gambling-house, where free entertainment is offered, but which in the end is paid for with a vengeance—a bait on the hook to catch fools. And the hook catches a vast number, especially young fools not accustomed to the city.

A suspicion that this kind of life would not turn out precisely what he had anticipated no doubt protrudes itself upon his meditations, but then he reassures himself with the thought that he does not intend it to be a permanency; that he will enjoy himself whilst young and afterward settle down to some substantial occupation suitable to his years. Still, he cannot conceal from himself that this kind of life is gaining in its hold upon him, fastening its grip tighter and tighter, so that when the time arrives for shaking it off it may not be so easily done. Suppose it will not be laid off—such things have happened—what would he do then?

Not only is a young man enslaved by this kind of life, but he is gaining a bad name. It has got out; vices cannot always be concealed. One who has been virtuous and upright when beginning a dissipated life may think nobody knows it, but a great many do know it. They see it in his flushed face, his expression and manner; sometimes his breath betrays him. The company he keeps and the irregular hours naturally excite apprehension even before more palpable facts are observed. It is clear that he is different from what he used to be, and, though love or friendship may strive to cover over the condition of things and hide unwelcome facts, sooner or later "truth will out."

Bad company and a bad name are bad capital to set out with in life. Who will employ in his service or form business arrangements with one who has a bad name. Leaving out of view the moral aspects of the case, bad conduct and bad habits are bad policy. Would it not be better to imitate the prodigal's elder brother and take life rationally? Such suggestions must arise sometimes in the midst of a loose, wayward career and will not be put down. They are the spectres which flit around the banquet-table.

4. The appetite for this kind of life *becomes ex-*

acting. As the great master of thought and human nature has it, "it grows by what it feeds upon," and the appetite has been growing upon this unhealthy stimulating diet until it has become voracious, refusing to be satisfied and evermore crying, "Give! Give!" It gains power and mastery, and becomes uncontrollable. What spectacle more pitiable than that of the wretched victim who

"Knows the right, and yet the wrong pursues,"

—who, condemning and abhorring himself and his ways,

"Resolves and resolves,
But still remains the same,"

driven on, as it would seem, with desperate persistence, though destruction and woe stand full in view? I have seen such waiting in these aisles and elsewhere to speak with the minister at the close of Sunday-night services, that they might at least unburden the wretched soul by telling their sad story, and to say with a pathos such as might touch a heart of stone, "Oh, sir, can't you help me to be free?" Yes, I have seen them weeping burning tears over the wretched slavery which they feel they cannot break.

Our prodigal, perhaps, did not quite reach this

stage, but he has not the power nor the moral courage to pause in his career, to bring his appetites into subjection, and he goes on and on in riotous living amid wretched associations until he has "spent all." One infatuation connected with such a life is the victim's persistent confidence that he can break off whenever he chooses. Reason and remonstrate with him, persuade and entreat if you will. "Oh," he will say, "you are mistaken about it; I can stop whenever I choose." But he doesn't choose—that is the difficulty—and, should he attempt it, he may find that he has miscalculated his power. In point of fact, he persists in willing the wrong and in doing it.

5. Another disheartening item to a prodigal in these circumstances is that his *means are steadily diminishing*. Yes, and rapidly too. This is an unwelcome discovery, but it is a thing which will make itself known. The pleasures of sin are not gratuitous, and are not usually purchased at low rates; pleasures of sin on a liberal scale are expensive. Riotous living costs money. Take the mere matter of drink. I am told that larger profits are made on wines and liquors, especially in the retail trade, than on any other article of commerce. Traffickers reckon upon the power of the appetite; they

know it will be gratified, come what may and cost what it may. So with regard to other indulgences. Living in his riotous manner, the prodigal must feel that all will soon be gone. Such thoughts are not pleasant or welcome, but they will sometimes obtrude and compel attention. Then, when all is gone—then what?”

But what difference is it to sin? Sin is exacting, sin is inexorable, sin is pitiless, sin takes money, takes strength, takes will-power, takes ambition, takes energy, takes hope, takes the immortal soul.

The text says the prodigal wasted his “substance.” The items just mentioned were that substance, and it is a substance that, once wasted, millions of money cannot buy back. The wretches who entice and help a young man into sin and woe are not the persons to help him out of them. They “squeeze the juice of the orange and throw the rind away.” How numerous the illustrations! A low, dirty, bloated, drunken vagabond comes along begging for a few pennies. Your friend beside you asks, “Do you know who that is? He belongs to one of the leading families of this city. But he is gone—gone!” Some such there are in yonder massive grated building beyond Jones’s Falls. Go visit it. As you walk the corridors the warden

tells you, "That fellow was once in high society. He inherited a fine fortune and had fine prospects, but he was led off from one thing to another, until he 'went to the bad.' Money gave out, but his appetites didn't. He took unlawful means to supply his empty purse, and that's what brought him here." So the far-off land does not look as inviting as at first. It has its drawbacks.

6. The prodigal begins to be *in want*. He came with a full purse, well dressed, good-looking, favorably spoken of and in a prosperous condition, but now he begins to be in want. When on the high tide of prosperity, though cautioned and warned, the words were wasted; in such circumstances they always are. Things have changed, however, and now he knows from experience that they were wise words. The distress asserts itself beyond all refutation or disputation. It weighs with practical argument upon him, pinching hard. He is in want—want. He lacks the very necessities of life; he is a starveling. When his purse was full, it seemed as if it would last always, but he had forgotten the old saying, "The fool and his money are soon parted."

Some years ago I heard of a case where a young man came into possession of certain arrearages of

pay—nearly a thousand dollars. He had never had so much in his life. His head was turned ; it made a fool of him. He determined to have one day's enjoyment to himself. He hired all the hacks in the town, and, though he could ride only in one, he was resolved that nobody should ride that day but himself. This could not last ; the silly fellow and his money soon parted.

Want is compared to a wolf—by no means a welcome visitor. The expression “wolf at the door” indicates want in the home. This poor fellow has no door for the wolf to come to ; he is a homeless wanderer. But the wolf follows him all day as he goes about, homeless, heartless, friendless and faint. The wolf of unsatisfied want dogs his steps ; and when he sinks in exhaustion, the wolf stands and glares at him. It even haunts him in his restless, unrefreshing sleep, so that he dreams of banquets and plenty within the old home, and then starts up, alas ! to find himself hungry still and that it was only a dream. Oh how surely sin winds one up ! How true the Bible's declaration that its “pleasures are but for a season” !

As with the prodigal, so more or less with the sinner in this world. He is “in want”—always in want. The want, indeed, may not assert itself in

the same conspicuous way, nor, for the present, in the same harassing and distressing manner, perhaps ; but there is a felt uneasiness, a vacuum the world can never fill. It is the want of peace with God, the want of a satisfying good for the soul, the want of an approving conscience, the want of preparation for death, judgment and eternity. The sinner's sins rise up before him ; he is convicted at the bar of conscience, and condemned. Then comes remorse, the agent in executing the penalty.

Such are some of the conditions of life in the far country, some of the results of what had seemed so inviting, so superior to old home attractions. What is the decision now, when there is an opportunity to compare the pleasures of the outset and the disappointments and sufferings of the afterward ?

In conclusion, notice

1. *The deceitfulness of sin.* This young man was led to believe that if he could only be released from the regimen of home and allowed to go where he wished and as he wished he would be happy. Sin was the suggester of that. Sin spoke those deceiving, lying words. Sin is a cheat, and has always been. In the first recorded history of our race, when man was in primeval innocence, the great

author and projector of sin in this world denied that if man ate the forbidden fruit he should surely die, and so sin has been saying to our race down through the centuries, and is still saying, with her promises, her insidiousness, her deceitfulness, her multiplied temptations poisoning the minds of the credulous and leading even the virtuous and the upright into paths of disobedience and disappointment. When the idea of future consequences is suggested—the idea of death temporal and death eternal—as the result of impenitence and indulgence, sin declares, “Thou shalt not surely die.” Sin lied at the outset; sin lies to-day. The Bible declares the great author of sin “a liar from the beginning.” Sin puts on an innocent guise—the garb of friendship—makes pleasant promises in a kindly voice, but, though

“She keeps the promise to the lip,
She breaks it to the hope,”

and in doing so breaks character, breaks prospects, breaks loving hearts, breaks down life itself, making wreck and ruin where there might have been good name, prosperity, honor, virtue and piety.

2. *See the folly of those who will persistently go into what cannot but bring disappointment and dis-*

aster. Neither much logic nor much philosophy is required to reach this conclusion; common sense suggests it. Sin so perverts the intelligence, arouses the passions and drowns the voice of reason and conscience that the poor victim rushes heedlessly into what reflection would assure him could bring only shame and sorrow. If men will handle fire, they should not be surprised if they are burned; if they will place themselves in the midst of venomous serpents, they will be apt to be bitten. Could they only be induced to look at those who have tried the banquet-halls of sinful indulgence, they could not but see that it always brings disaster, that "the wages of sin is death." How true the language of the Bible as regards the conduct of the wicked!—"Madness is in their heart while they live."

The poor unfortunates in insane asylums are not the only lunatics, nor the worst class of them. Moral—or, rather, immoral—lunatics are the worst, for theirs is a self-inflicted, self-continued lunacy, and a lunacy which not only overthrows reason, but destroys the immortal soul. Let me exhort you to look before you in the important steps you are taking in life. Think twice—think many times—before you commit yourself in ways of folly and

indulgence. Learn, when the tempter assails, to say "No." That will be a great help in life. Learn to say "NO."

3. *Boon-companions in sin are not the people to help when trouble comes.* I would emphasize this because it is a discovery uniformly made by the victims of sin, but made too late. Whilst the money lasts there will be no lack of "friends" to dine and drink at their expense, to throw the dice with him whilst they win and he loses; but when all is gone and he turns to these "friends," they do not care for his company; and if he pushes himself and perhaps reminds them how he did toward them in his prosperous days, they become impatient, tell him they have had enough of this thing; they are tired of it, and it must be stopped. Ah! what a world this is!

Finally, notice that *the way of transgressors is hard.* How beautiful the broad way seems at the beginning! Such a magnificent avenue, a splendid roadway, such multitudes upon it, so gorgeous and gay, so full of stir, excitement and parade! Wide are its portals, and many there be which go in thereat, but it is a bad road. Though all may seem well for a while, things will change for the worse; for "there is a way which seemeth right

unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." May you never learn this by experience! And if there be one here to-night who has learned it, God pity you, friend, God help you out of it! Nothing but grace can do that. But I thank God that grace is offered even to the most abandoned—offered to "whosoever will accept it."

TROUBLES IN THE FAR COUNTRY.

“And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country.”

LUKE xv. 15.

V.

TROUBLES IN THE FAR COUNTRY.

THOSE who have read the Latin classics will remember that the familiar quotation "*Facilis decensus Averni*" is used by the poet in reference to the descent of Æneas into hell to have an interview with his father, Anchises, and to his finding the return obstructed, illustrating the idea that it is easier to get into difficulty than to get out of it, easier to travel the downward road than to retrace one's steps. If the prodigal son, amongst other advantages, had received a liberal education, it is not impossible that the experience of Æneas might have occurred to him as now being reduplicated in his unfortunate self. With his pockets filled with money, with abundant boon-companions, with pleasures by day and pleasures by night, it was plain and pleasant sailing—smooth seas, propitious breezes, bright skies, all "merry as a marriage-bell." But now things are different. With money gone, friends gone, pleasures gone, character gone, respect gone,

what remains but rebuffs, disappointment, well-nigh despair? His condition has become so pressing that he cannot remain inert, grieving over the now-regretted past. He feels but too keenly that regrets will not bring back by-gones. To replace himself where he once was is impossible; he does not even hope for that. The jewel he has so ruthlessly thrown away he does not hope to recall. Even could he reform and henceforth lead an upright life, the dark chapters can never be obliterated, nor can their pernicious effects, morally and physically, be entirely overcome. As at present situated his case has taken on the worst possible type. Not only have the means and the opportunities once his been recklessly and hopelessly squandered, but actual want has come and with cruel, remorseless power is pressing on him. If life itself can be preserved, he cannot see by what means it shall be done. Hunger gnaws at his vitals day after day, strength is gradually failing, and at this rate it cannot be long before nature must succumb. Yes, easy was the descent to Avernus, but the way of escape seems not only difficult, but wellnigh impossible.

However, our prodigal, great as is his extremity and bitterly as he may regret his folly, cannot give

up all hope. "While there is life there is hope." Possibly there may be some way of delaying the final catastrophe until times improve. Perhaps he can find somebody who will employ him and give him enough to keep off actual want; so our young man sets out to seek employment.

1. We call your attention first to the

INHERENT DIFFICULTIES IN THE PRODIGAL'S CASE.

He is really not adapted for any useful service. He cannot do manual labor: he is not physically capable, not having been trained to muscular exertion and endurance. Like the unjust steward in another parable, he might say, "I cannot dig." Indeed, he has not been brought up to any kind of self-help; his education, training, habits, tastes, have been very different from that. He was one of those counted the favored among mankind, being amply provided for and with no necessity for industrial occupation. Hence he finds himself in a most perplexing condition. With money gone, prospects gone, friends gone, with no employment and with no fitness for helping himself, what is he to do?

2. This brings us to notice

THE FOLLY OF PARENTS WHO TRAIN UP SONS
TO DO NOTHING,

no matter if they have the fortune of Crœsus. I care not how brilliant their children's prospects, nor what their resources and advantages : the father who brings up his children to do nothing makes a capital mistake. In this country, happily, we have no law of primogeniture by which, as in the Old World, property is indefinitely transmitted through the eldest son from generation to generation. Fortunes with us, after having passed into one generation, must afterward take their chance. And how few fortunes are kept intact ! How soon they go into other hands ! How soon, indeed, they are completely scattered ! How the wheel revolves ! Here is a man who was on the top not long ago, but the wheel has been turning, and he is going down rapidly, if, indeed, he is not already at the bottom. How many once-conspicuous families in our large cities have fallen entirely out of sight ! How quickly changes follow one another in this rotary land ! How often the third generation is among the poorest ! How important that when sons may be deprived of paternal wealth they should be able to earn a living for themselves !

The disadvantage of inheriting wealth is twofold: it brings necessarily increase of temptation, and it brings usually to impractical heirs the probability that if disaster overtakes them they will not be prepared so to meet it as to rise above misfortune and make a new and noble history; so that it is eminently wise and important, no matter what a young man's prospects, that he should be taught to help himself. Had it been thus with the prodigal, finding he was in danger of want he could have comforted himself with the reflection that he had been accustomed to business—that, notwithstanding the prospect of a fortune, he was educated to do something—so that when the pinch of the famine came he could have said to any who might be concerned for him, "Oh, you needn't be troubled about me; I can take care of myself." But when the person is a broken-down young "gentleman," who will hire him? Poor material this to bring into the market—a wornout *roué*, a fast young man about town who has got to the end of his string. Who will hire him? Who wants him; He could not earn his salt. What sort of a day-laborer would he make? Farmers would not have him for a farm-hand; how many hours could he do field-work? The proprietor would be too smart to

be encumbered with such rubbish when good hard workers glut the market and are begging for employment.

Our prodigal's condition grows worse and worse. Though he is trying to hire himself, nobody seems disposed to take him ; he is a drug on the market. How mortifying are constant repulses ! How disheartening, applying from door to door only to be told again and again that he is not wanted ! His very appearance is against him, looking as if he had seen better days and had been brought down by irregular living.

Another thing in which also the prodigal resembles the unjust steward is that *he cannot beg*. Wonderful is it how pride lingers. When prosperity is gone, when friends are gone, when home is gone, when all adaptation to useful occupation is gone, there is still some sort of pride. Self-respect is commendable. Even in the humblest circumstances that pride which restrains one from doing an unworthy thing is deserving of praise. But "poor and proud," in the usual sense, is most unfortunate, standing in the way, as it so often does, of accepting the new conditions Providence is indicating, and of honestly and vigorously making the most of them, thus commanding respect for the beautiful

deportment and not unfrequently winning success from the midst of misfortune.

No doubt the prodigal's pride was sorely tried. No doubt it pained him much to be seeking a place as a hireling where he had so recently been "a society young man" going the rounds of pleasure; but it pained him still more to go hungry to bed and to wake up hungry in the morning; so that, however disposed to be proud as well as poor, he had no alternative but to accept the situation and take whatever he could get.

"Poor and proud" is a conjunction only too common now. In order to keep up appearances how many resort to shuffling and expedients such as in the nature of the case cannot cover up unwelcome facts and tend only to enhance the already onerous privation and discomfort! Others, in order to indulge themselves in what is beyond their means, resort to deception and fraud. Some young men who come to sojourn a while in the city do this. Not willing, like the prodigal, to seek employment, they resort to asking "a little assistance." They want it for only a short time. Sometimes they come to the minister, sometimes they represent themselves as having been disappointed in getting "an expected check." A few years ago a young

man who had been some months in the city, and whom I had seen several times, came to me with this check-story, stating that his father was to send him one and that it would certainly arrive the next day, but that he was obliged to have money at once, and that if I would advance it, it would be returned to me within twenty-four hours. I did so, and, though years have passed, I have never heard of the money nor of the young man. Even our prodigal was not so mean as that.

Another thing besetting the prodigal is

THE DIFFICULTY OF GETTING BACK HOME.

The land he is in is a far-off land. This is in accordance with his original intention, but he overreached himself in going so far. His desire was to get so far away from the home people as to be beyond their interference, and even their hearing of him, but in doing this he has placed a serious obstacle in the way of his securing help in his extremity. How can a poor wretch such as he travel that distance? Travel requires money, and where can he get that? How illustrative of a sinner's difficulties! Sin carries the sinner so far away that to get back of himself is impossible.

Then, whilst necessity suggests returning to his

kindred as a relief from his distress—and possibly the only one—the prodigal cannot say he is anxious to go. How could he in his present condition show himself where everybody knows him? Is he ready to be rebuked or repulsed by the old father whom he has distressed and dishonored? Can he bear to be the theme of neighborhood jeers and jests? for in a dull country neighborhood such a theme would only be too welcome. He has not got quite to that. What consequences sin entails! Meanwhile, the wolf of hunger still follows him with glaring eyes and with jaws ready to devour. He must do something. He will hire himself for any service, no matter how degrading, and for any price, no matter what. But all the usual places are occupied, and he is constrained to say to himself, “No man hath hired me; no man will hire me.” He betakes himself to the country, and at length finds a proprietor who consents to take him, though for a most humbling employment: he sends him into his fields to feed swine. He does not give him even the poor terms “food and clothing;” the young man does not get servants’ fare, or, if he does, it is so stinted that his hunger is not allayed, and he would fain fill his belly with the husks which the swine were eating. In his extremity he has come down so low as to

share the banquet of the hogs. Such are "the wages of sin."

"Beggars cannot be choosers" is an old saying, and, though the prodigal does not confess himself a beggar, he is in a strait compelling him to take whatever he can get and to be thankful for that. Every effort has failed. No doubt he has appealed to the kindness—even to the pity—of those who used to eat his dinners and drink his wines in his flush days, but they have no use for him now, and bluff him off, telling him that things have changed. Even the threadbare relics of his gentlemanly days are witnesses against him and make mock at his misfortunes.

The prodigal's employment, too, is specially humiliating to him as a Jew, inasmuch as the swine were unclean animals according to his religion, and as such were forbidden and despised; so that employment the most degrading and despicable contributes to prostrate the last remnants of pride and self-respect. His occupation, however, has one recommendation: it suits a man who is fit for nothing else. Any one can sit in a field and look at hogs and give them husks to eat; no skill or ability is needed for that.

The occupation has another advantage: it fur-

nishes abundant opportunity for meditation. If disposed to review his life and make up an opinion upon it, the prodigal certainly can do it now. I have thought, when observing that picturesque sight so often seen in the Highlands of Scotland, the shepherd away off on the lonely hillside with his flock around him, what a life for meditation his might be. What a singular history, passing all his days with only dumb nature and these dumb creatures as his companions ! How much opportunity for profitable reflection ! So this poor prodigal among his hogs has opportunity to think. And how the past comes up, the ghosts of departed hours and wasted advantages ! How he recalls the days of prosperity, the bright pictures of childhood's home and youth's abundance, when there "was enough and to spare" and when there were kind and loving hearts always ready to make much of him ; and all this, and more, left so sadly, so wickedly ! How does that past look from the present standpoint ? What are his views of a life of pleasure now ? What is his decision upon the question whether he has not been making himself a fool ?

"'Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours,
And ask them what report they bore to heaven,
And how they might have borne more welcome news."

The only food he has proves inadequate. The pods of the carob tree—a common food for swine in the East, wretched provision for man at best—have become so parched and crisp under the burning drought that they are nothing more than dry husks, having little or no nutriment, and he strives in vain to fill himself with them and thus appease the pangs within; so that we hear from him the plaintive cry, “I perish with hunger.” The wolf has him now. He has been following him all along, and holds him at last in his grasp; so that he cries out, “I perish!”

It is said that a drowning man has brought before him in a moment his whole past life. Persons rescued after having become insensible tell us that such has been their experience—that all seemed to come before them at once. Possibly it may have been so, when the keen pangs of hunger had reached the point where the prodigal felt he was perishing, that the past came crowding up with all its aggravating pictures. And what a past that must have seemed to him!

Look now at the moral teachings of this part of the prodigal's history.

1. *He never thought he would come to this.* When leaving home, a young man in good health, good

society and with abundant means, he would not have believed that he could possibly descend so low. The gentleman's son of that day—the fine young gentleman—is now a vagabond. Yes, a vagabond. Who ever would have thought that of him? To himself he may say, “Could I have believed I could ever go so far astray? But I was deceived.” Yes, he was deceived. He was too self-confident and too venturesome. “He that trusteth in his own heart,” says the Bible, “is a fool.” How many the outcasts in Baltimore who were once reputable and promising when starting on their downward course could have been made to believe they would ever come to what they now know themselves to be? Could the picture of their present degraded selves have been shown them in their days of comparative purity as their future portrait, with indignation they would have exclaimed, “Is thy servant a dog?”

Young men are the same now. If there be one to whom these words come who has already ventured too far under the stress of temptation, and kind friends should caution and remonstrate with him in love and faithfulness, I fear it would be just the same in as a thousand other cases. The friend would be met with the reply, “Oh, you are

entirely mistaken. You needn't fear for me ; there's no danger." How many times I have heard that ! How many times I have seen those of whom there was " no danger " afterward miserable prodigals !

2. Those who seek their portion from sin and pleasure or from any mere worldly good, like the prodigal, are *feeding on husks*. Even should you gain that which you are seeking—if you should have abundance to meet every wish, if you should have sinful pleasures and worldly good to the utmost—it will still be true that you are feeding upon husks. Certain it is that

"The world can never give
The bliss for which we sigh."

It was not designed for that ; God made us for higher and nobler ends. How uniform the experience of those who leave the fountain of living waters and endeavor to quench their thirst from the world's " broken cisterns " that they find themselves perishing !

One of the most lamentable and impressive illustrations of the emptiness of all mere human good may be seen at the great fashionable watering-places where throngs of pleasure-seekers congregate. Their resources are unbounded. No stint for money—

always at hand, that golden key which opens every door—whilst opportunity stands ready on every side and in every variety. Yet how pitiful the result! How these people turn unsatisfied from each folly they have rushed into to seek a fresh one! how, after exhausting all the usual rounds, they grasp at anything, however trifling and contemptible, simply because it is new, the remorseless appetite ever crying out for some change and catching eagerly at anything if it is only new!

What a graphic, touching and admonitory picture is that drawn by King Solomon of his personal experience when ranging without stint all the fields of earthly good—when having set himself purposely to “prove” this thing, and having said to himself, “Enjoy pleasure”—how, after having gone the rounds of sensual good, having provided for himself palaces, parks, lakes and forests, vast treasures of silver and gold, “cattle upon a thousand hills,” innumerable men-servants and maidens, the most accomplished men-singers, women-singers and players on instruments—indeed, according to his own statement, having not “withheld his heart from any joy” and having prospered in every particular; so that he says he was “great before all that were before him;” and yet the cravings of his soul were

not satisfied! "Then," says he, "I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and behold, *all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.*" His loaded princely banquet-tables, after all, had fed him on "husks;" so that, after having tried in vain to fill himself, he had to wail out the mournful dirge, "And yet I perish with hunger!"

So it is still with those who seek to satisfy themselves with carnal things. They are feeding on husks—husks of fashionable vanities; husks of frivolous follies; husks of parade and display, with the sauce of "envy, jealousy and all uncharitableness;" husks at the gaming-table and the horse-race; husks in all the lower lusts.

No; the immortal nature fashioned after the image of God refuses to be satisfied with these earthly husks; so that the votaries of worldliness and sin emerge from their revelings and banquetings finding them worthless and unsatisfying; so that, had we only ears to hear the language of their inmost spirits, it would be, "Oh, sirs, sirs, we are perishing with hunger!" As one has most appropriately said, "The crowning misery, too, is that the power of sinful gratifications to stay that hunger

but for the moment is diminishing, the pleasure which is even hoped for from them still growing fainter, and yet the goad behind urging to seek that pleasure still becoming fiercer, the sense of the horrible nature of the bondage thus increasing with overpowering intensity." Witness the testimony of that most gifted genius, Byron. Though still comparatively a young man, sin had so burned out both body and soul that on his last birthday he wrote,

"My days are in the yellow leaf;
 The flowers and fruits of love are gone:
 The worm, the canker and the grief
 Are mine alone.

"The fire that on my bosom preys
 Is lone as some volcanic isle;
 No torch is kindled at its blaze,
 A funeral-pile!"

3. See, also, here illustrated the tendency of the unrenewed soul, when made conscious of its need, to seek *relief from mere natural sources*. This wretched young man in his efforts to find relief hired himself to "a citizen of that country," the far-off land, instead of endeavoring at once to return, if possible, to the father's house. Such is the general habit of those who are in the far-off land of sin. But the

only possible hope in the circumstances is at once to forsake the wretched land and all that belongs to it. To linger here is to hunger still, and all expedients which stop short of an absolute and final forsaking of the doomed country of sin must inevitably fail. Compromises will be in vain. Giving up some evil habit, resolving to "do better," beginning to attend church, "confirmation," "making a profession of religion" and "going to the communion,"—none of these, without grace in the heart and penitence at Jesus' feet, will avail. Sinners must learn the imperative necessity of looking beyond all human resources and beyond all mere instrumentalities if they would secure help for their perishing souls. Cease from hiring yourself to human devices and to mere "instrumentalities," and come to Him who has power to give all you need.

"To you, O young men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, understand wisdom; hear, for I speak to you of excellent things. The opening of my lips shall be of right things. Whosoever findeth me"—that is, true religion—"findeth life and shall obtain favor of the Lord."

COMING TO HIS RIGHT MIND.

"And when he came to himself."

LUKE xv. 17.

VI.

COMING TO HIS RIGHT MIND.

THE term "moral insanity," though sometimes used to shield crime, represents a reality and prevails more extensively than the ordinarily-recognized type of mental aberration. The Scriptures represent ungodly sinners as bereft of reason: "Madness is in their hearts while they live." The conduct of many, indeed, is so contrary to sound judgment, self-interest and common sense, so infatuated, reckless and desperate, so foolish and wild, that the only solution possible is that they are crazy—that the mind is acting in an abnormal and unhealthy manner or that the controlling faculty has been entirely dethroned. Sometimes, indeed, it seems as if there were a sort of duality, a double personality, one of which reasons correctly and forms just conclusions, the other of which throws overboard reason, good sense and welfare for time and eternity—every interest, indeed—and

rushes to what would seem inevitable and irretrievable destruction. Not a few in this day illustrate this sad condition. They live and act as if they were insane.

Combined with moral insanity ; and accessory thereto, are often those fatal delusions practiced by the devil to which the apostle refers when he says, "The god of this world hath blinded their minds, lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine unto them ;" to this condition, with appetite and passion asserting full and unrestrained power, with reason virtually dethroned and the mind blinded against healthful, saving light, what can remain but complete and final disaster ?

The prodigal has apparently been approximating, if he has not actually reached, this sad condition. Madman he has been from the day he left his father's house, and, judging from analogous cases, his case must have passed into the last stage and must be beyond human remedy. Happily for him, he is to be an exception. He is to be arrested in his downward career ; he is to look at things in a new and more healthful light ; he is to come to his right mind. Our topic leads us to notice

I. The evidences of the prodigal's moral insanity. First, his

UNREAL AND DISTORTED VIEWS.

We encountered this at the outset. Perhaps no young man in that region was more desirably situated. He had a good home, a good station in society, abundant means and everything to make him thankful for his lot, but he had perverted ideas in regard to what was for his advantage. Like so many of his class, he could not see things in their true light. He felt that he was not getting what he was entitled to get, that the time had come when childish things should be put away. He felt that he was able to take care of himself without being still kept, as it were, "under tutors and governors." From this habit of looking at things, how natural that he should begin to regard himself as wronged, as restrained of his liberty, as not allowed the privileges of others of his class!

True, we may say with confidence that he is in error, that he has all the privileges which are really best for him. We may be sure that the rule of a father whose conduct, as we see, was only too indulgent, could not have been unreasonable and rigorous. It was not true that the son's rights were invaded, that the father was unwilling to allow to his sons the liberties he had enjoyed him-

self in his young days; it was not true that the best thing for the young man would be for the father to fill his pockets and let him go. No; it was by no means true, as subsequent events only too clearly and sadly proved, that his welfare or his real happiness would be enhanced by his departing to other scenes and exchanging home and its advantages for some place he knows not where and associates he knows not whom; or, to put it still more appositely, that he should be allowed to depart on an errand whose chief incentive was freedom from all wholesome restraint and liberty to run to every excess of riot. The experiment, thoroughly made, proved that moral restrictions are wholesome and wise, and placed only where to overstep them will be to encroach upon and destroy true interest and happiness. If to escape from home may sometimes bring advantages, it must be remembered that it also involves serious risks. But our young man was not in a frame of mind to appreciate the latter; he could see but one side of the question. Money and freedom were his only ideas of life. He had become a monomaniac; reason and judgment were dethroned. He was not in his right mind.

2. He was

DEAF TO THE TEACHINGS OF EXPERIENCE.

It is not true that in a quiet country neighborhood there are no opportunities for improvement, and that everything desirable is accumulated in the great outside world. Many a man when in obscurity, by making the most of even limited advantages, has laid the foundations of a future eminence, and his success, indeed, has been all the greater because freedom from distraction and temptation had enabled him to concentrate his attention upon the one thing of self-culture, until when, finally, the fullness of time came for him to step out on the stage of life's activities, he was equal to the occasion and proved himself "every inch a man."

The great world-centres are dependent almost for existence on a constant inflow of fresh blood and vital force from the rural regions. City wear and tear, effeminacy and luxury, strain upon sensibilities and nerve-power, use up the human material with great rapidity ; so that the population in time would die out unless replenished from fresh, original sources. But, mark you, the outside material, in order to vitalize the degenerating population, must retain its purity. For unsophisticated young men

from the country to throw themselves into the vortex of city temptations and vices is only to increase more rapidly the waste it was designed to prevent, for no victims are so readily ensnared and none so soon run their race as the inexperienced and the unsophisticated when once they have yielded to the enchantments of the world, the flesh and the devil.

In times far past human nature was much the same as it is now. This young man may have known some from his own young circle who had tried the experiment of exchanging the simple, quiet life of a virtuous country neighborhood for the great world, and that shipwreck of property, character, health, life, had been the result was neighborhood talk. But the experience of such has no weight with one whose heart is set on making the experiment for himself. Our young man, though there were no newspapers, railroads or telegraphs, still had heard and was hearing the rush and roar of the great world, and he was determined that he would go into it and see for himself. No matter though others had been destroyed in the vortex of its sins; no matter though he had been warned: all was as empty breath to him. In spite of cautions and remonstrances and warnings he was determined to try

it for himself. He was infatuated; you might as well reason with a madman. He was not in his right mind.

3. There are a disregard and a

CONTEMPT OF PALPABLE FACTS,

as encountered in his own experience. After reaching the foreign land he must have discovered very soon that it was not the elysium represented, that it was not so perfectly fascinating in every particular, such a garden of enjoyments, so replete with pleasures all day long and all night long, as he had pictured it. Sometimes, perhaps, he was lonely, possibly a little homesick; at any rate, thoughtful. Turning matters over in his mind, he might conclude that "all is not gold that glitters"—that the dreamed-of pleasures of sin were not fulfilling their promise.

Fruits of the fast life he may not have gathered as yet in large clusters and superabundance until they rotted on his hands, but there were those around him who had. There were some striking examples. There were young men who were fast, and had been fast until they had nearly run their race. He had observed them; he could see and judge for himself whether this kind of life was

“genuine gold” or whether it was but a mockery and a cheat.

But such suggestions fail to break the spell. The unhealthy mental state continues. He cannot see his danger. “In vain,” says the Bible, “is the snare set in the sight of any bird.” Even the little bird, if you wish to entrap it, must be caught with guile. The trap has to be concealed: “in vain is the snare set *in the sight*” of the bird. Even the poor little bird, with its limited intelligence, will not walk knowingly into the trap, and especially if it should see that other birds are being caught. It is wise enough not to do that. But some young men are not as smart as birds; they will go into the trap with their eyes open. You may put a sign over the door, and they will still go in. The trap may be lighted up at night, so that all knowing ones may see what it is, and, instead of going to their rest, as all good birds should do, they will go into the trap. There are plenty of traps in these large cities, and, unfortunately, birds from the country—unsophisticated birds—are most easily caught. “In vain is the snare set in the sight of any *bird*,” but not in vain shall it be set in the sight of many a young man.

Unfortunately, the snares are various. Gamblers

set their traps, and although they may keep the windows closed, as if the house were unoccupied, they manage to call the attention of their victims. Gamblers use free entertainments as a bait, but make you pay a heavy price before you are out of the toils. Gamblers may keep their places going through the livelong night and will make you welcome at any hour, and as often as you may enter, until they have exhausted your purse, and then they will give you no more welcomes and no more free suppers. Other traps are set, and before the eyes of young men, and they will go into them even though they never come out safe. Certain it is that, though they may not be finally caught and held, they will feel the effects as long as they live.

Though our prodigal has found from sad experience the falsity and the folly of his loose and reckless course, it does not arrest him. He goes, and goes again. Not like the bird is he warned by the fate of others, nor does he learn wisdom by his own experience. He perseveres, and with unabated ardor; comes off damaged, but goes again; and continues to go until lack of means, wreck of health or other failure disables him, when he is thrown aside as worthless. Is this not infatuation? Is it

not insanity? Can a young man be in his right mind who allows himself to be deceived, ensnared and held in dismal bondage, led captive, despoiled and destroyed, body and soul, by evil-doers and enemies?

Insanity was also illustrated in the young man's absolute

WANT OF FORESIGHT AND REGARD FOR THE FUTURE.

Here was property which in the course of nature would be coming to him, and which, properly used, would no doubt support him in comfort and respectability, and until it did come to him in due process he would have a home and ample provision. But time and Providence moved too slowly for him; he must have it at once and he must use it at once, no matter what might come in the future. He placed no correct value upon it; it was a mere minister to his pleasures. The more pleasure accessible, the more freely it goes, and as to planning or caring for the future, or even endeavoring to make the money last or eking it out so as to prolong his pleasures, he would not do it. I believe there is a revelers' song the sentiment of which is that they must "not think of the morrow." No wonder they sing it.

Could they realize what those morrows are to be, they would not care to see them in advance; one sight would be quite enough.

The insane squander property; so does the prodigal. The insane have no concern for their good name; neither has the prodigal. The insane are reckless as to the company they keep; so is the prodigal. The insane will venture into imminent peril; so will the prodigal. The record tells us that he not only squandered his substance in riotous living, but kept company with harlots. Reputable friends will not follow him into such associations, will not invite him to their houses, will not recognize him. His prospects—what are they now? How can there be “prospects” for such a character? All the fundamental principles on which might be predicated a favorable future he is abjuring. Even his capacity to achieve he is undermining by days of dissipation and nights of rioting. He is steadfastly attacking not only honor and peace, but health, reason and life. Assaults so tremendous and persistent on his store of life and strength are exhausting it before the time, and soon he will have run the race and will be flung out of it. Our courts, when the case demands it, appoint a commission of lunacy to take

charge of the property of the insane; had there been such in that day, what could have been more proper for this young man? Pity that such commissions could not be appointed for many such people now! Certainly they are not competent to take care of themselves.

It is customary to speak of the destroying ravages of sin, but it almost seems that we do even sin injustice, forgetting the proverb, "Give the devil his due." Sin does destroy, but how often the dissipated young man joins hands with sin to destroy himself. Can he be in his right mind? Should there not be a commission of lunacy, seeing he is throwing himself into the consuming fires of hell?

II. Notice now some of the circumstances calculated to bring the prodigal once more to his right mind.

1. Though he had not been himself in all this sad history,

HE MUST HAVE SUFFERED FROM SELF-REPROACH AND CONDEMNATION.

It is one of the blessed provisions in the constitution of our nature that we cannot all at once bring ourselves to approve our evil deeds, that there is a

voice within not only saying, "This is wrong," but also inflicting a certain retribution. Judges may fail to decide wisely, juries may sometimes bring in an erroneous verdict, but here are judge, jury and court which will not be diverted from a right judgment. Though we escape the laws of the land and bid defiance to the moral law, there is a tribunal within the soul which arraigns, convicts and condemns, and whose judgment will not in any circumstances be set aside.

Self-conviction, self-condemnation and self-contempt, no doubt, were this young man's familiar visitors. As the sense of his degradation and the power of his sinful life become more fixed and onerous he no longer excuses or palliates his vices; he confesses judgment. Yes, I have seen such men—how often! They have come to me and told their sorrowful story. Even the telling it has proved a relief to the poor burdened mind. So with this prodigal. He has reached that condition in which he is willing to confess and unbosom himself, so heavily do his thoughts oppress him, so fiercely do they torment him, and so overwhelmingly do the tremendous convolutions of conscience enfold him. He is getting into a condition in which, possibly, he may be driven to look upon things from

a more healthy standpoint. Who knows but that suffering may bring him to his senses?

2. He recalls the past, and

SORROWFULLY PONDERING HIS BETTER DAYS.

What was he once? Respectable and respected, with friends in the best circles, family well to do, favored in circumstances, prospects good, and good character. With application and the influence he could command, no young man, perhaps, had a better outlook. But now what is he? Poor, friendless, ragged, starving, with swine for his only companions. This is a come-down in the world. But he is not alone; there have been many such. Some of them are behind the gratings over yonder; some of them are under the ground over yonder, and some of them had better be. They go reeling to their homes to be a nuisance and a curse to wife and children, or they become a public nuisance. They seem to have passed the point where they can be reclaimed.

But it is not too late for the prodigal. Off in the field, in his loneliness, there are time and opportunity to review his record. And how sad that record! He has opportunity, too, to recall the old home. Oh, if he could see it once more—its abundance,

its healthful tone, its kindliness ! Could one of those loving voices only once more fall upon his dreary, desolate ear and heart ! “Those inmates—I wonder if they ever think of me now ? Their far-away boy—where is he ? No letters from him, no news. Where is he ? Is he alive, or is he dead ?” Who on earth can ever be to this young man what these home friends were to him ? All this was his once, yet he threw it all away. Fool that he was ! “Infatuated,” does he say ? “Crazy,” he says ; “I was not in my right mind.”

3. Another consideration is the

COMPLETE DISAPPOINTMENT AND FAILURE

as to the objects for which he forsook his home. He had not realized what he anticipated. In the fancy-pictures with which he had entertained himself as to the pleasures of residence in the foreign lands, all the conditions of that sort of life were calculated upon with absolute certainty, but in actual fact it had been different. The pleasure was temporary and fleeting : it was like flowers that bloom but for a little time and then are blighted by the killing frost, or like the night-blooming cereus, which spreads out its glories and diffuses its fragrance but for a single night, and before the

morning dawns is dead. Such are the splendid assemblies of the gay, where brilliant revelers seem floating in a fairy-scene, but the next day

“The lights are fled,
The garlands dead,
And all but me departed.”

Yes, after the debauch comes the fearful “next morning,” as Bulwer terms it—the parched lip, the fevered brow, the bursting eyeballs, the *ennui*, the wishing he were dead. The whole proceeding, now that time for review and reflection has come, he cannot but feel has been, to say the least, a stupendous mistake. If he could only be put back where he was before he demanded the “substance,” with the comforts, enjoyments and prospects which he then had, how quickly he would grasp the opportunity and thank God for it! But this has gone, and cannot be reclaimed.

If there were on that window-pane some winter morning a beautiful frost-etching made by the freezing of the atmospheric moisture into the most delicate and exquisite tracery such as man’s skill can never equal, I might take my hand and in a moment wipe it off, but who could ever replace it? That tracery-work is purity, chastity, virtue; this

wiped off, who can ever replace it as at first? Reformation there may be, but never restored innocence as at first. There must be regrets, memories and results often affecting character or principle or health whilst time lasts, or even whilst eternity endures.

The most malignant enemy could not have done worse for this young man than he has done for himself. What he had hailed as liberty has proved a galling bondage; what he had hoped would be a kingly banquet has proved husks and starvation. Was ever such disappointment? It seems as if it had been a horrid dream from which he has only just awaked. How different from what it seemed in advance, seen amidst the glow and halo of inexperienced fancy, seen before exhaustive enjoyment had brought reaction! When he looks back upon it, how vain and empty seem to have been all the glitter and pageantry! Things are now getting into their proper proportions; he is coming to his right mind, and through a hard tuition. The discipline of actual, intense suffering is helping to bring him round.

Suffering is a schoolmaster. Some schoolmasters cannot get the attention of their pupils, some schoolmasters cannot bring their pupils to learn the les-

sons set them, but Suffering is a schoolmaster to whom none can fail to give attention. When he brings pain, distress, disappointment, remorse of conscience and disgust with self, his pupils cannot but take heed to the lesson, and it is certain that unless there come a speedy change in them he can increase the treatment until they shall pause and listen to the instructor. To our poor prodigal, suffering has taught wholesome lessons, and the lessons are accomplishing their object: they are bringing him around. He has seen the glamour and falsehood surrounding earthly good, and he has discovered how great his folly in being borne away by such phantoms and deceptive cheats. The "dream of his life" which haunted him at the old home—the "dream" of getting off to enjoy himself—is ended, and it has proved only "a dream at the best." Dream? It was not a dream: it has been a tremendous reality, and it has left the barque which went out with everything taut and bright, spars symmetrical and beautiful, sails all set and breezes fresh and fair, to come back a poor shattered wreck, just getting into port, and no more.

Awaked from his delusion, the prodigal comes to the conviction that something must be done; he sees that there is

ONLY ONE POSSIBILITY OF ESCAPE.

What is that? Shall he encourage it? Can he? Must he even think of it? *It is to return to the old home.* Is this practicable? Seriously pondering that possibility, how it opens the long-sealed fountains of the obdurate and debased soul! Poor creature! Though his eyes are long unused to weeping, what burning tears now flow even at the thought of once more seeing that dear old home! Possibly there may be hope. The prospect, all things considered, is not cheering, but there is no alternative. It is this, or perish. He will venture, come what may. He will not expect his old place; he will not mention it. Oh, if he can have the humblest servant's place, that will be more than enough; he will only be too thankful. The delusion, then, is gone at last; the spell that had bound him and had wrecked him is broken. The poor creature is once more in his right mind; he has come to himself.

Now, in conclusion, notice

THE DEVIL'S DELUSIONS.

How important to guard against them! Dear young friends, many of you, I thank God! are not, and never will be, prodigal sons. You will

be upright, virtuous, honorable ; you will be true men ; you will be respected, and will make your way in the world. But, nevertheless, the devil's delusions may pursue you. Remember that, though in one sense you may not be a prodigal, in another sense you are a prodigal, away from the Best of fathers, away in the world's temptations and ensnarements—away, if not in the midst of riotous living, yet bowed down to worship idols. Ambition, wealth, vain display, pleasure, you are worshiping as a prodigal from the heavenly Father's house.

How happy they who by grace divine are rescued from the devices of sin and Satan and sitting at Jesus' feet clothed and in their right mind !

Self-denial you must surely practice. Purity and piety will cost you something, but they are worth much. Sometimes, when the forbidden fruit hangs fair and beautiful and promises to be luscious to the taste, it may require strong will, purpose and principle to say "No." But in that "No" is safety ; in that "No" is a good conscience ; in that "No" is purity of heart ; in that "No," by grace divine, through Jesus' blood, is the favor of God. May God bring us all, as to our spiritual and eternal welfare, to our right minds !

THE PRODIGAL RETURNS HOME.

“And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

LUKE xv. 20-24.

VII.

THE PRODIGAL RETURNS HOME.

HOW much of personal history is sometimes compressed within a short space! The interests involved are of such extraordinary importance, so absorbing the attention, harrowing the sensibilities and stirring every element of the soul, that what has occupied only a small space of time seems as if it had been spread over a protracted period. To our prodigal it must have "seemed an age" since he left the old home—all his previous life, perhaps, does not appear so long—yet probably it has been only a year or two, perhaps not so long.

"A day to suffering seems like a year;

A year, like passing ages."

Then not only does suffering seem to prolong time, but a great number of events and various phases of experience compressed within a short space have the effect of seemingly prolonging it. Both these causes combined, as in the prodigal's

case, must have made the time appear very long since the unhappy day he said "Good-bye" to his people.

What may not have occurred in that home since the wanderer left? What may not have been the sorrowful effects of his misbehavior? What may not have been the fatal results of the thorns he left to fester in tender, loving hearts? Such chapters of cruel conduct have been but too often written in scalding tears. Its mementoes have been vacuums in the home-circle which nothing could fill; its monuments have been real graves and tombstones. But, whatever the conditions of life at present existing in the old home, the prodigal will soon discover them for himself.

We come now to consider

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

We have already seen that things have reached a crisis with the wretched young man. The struggle is now for life. To linger longer here is impossible; the alternative is simply leave or die. If he does leave, whither can he turn his longing eyes and tottering feet but to the forsaken father's house? Natural affection offers some basis for hope, for, though he himself has trampled on this tender tie

and ruthlessly thrown it away, he knows full well that the home people are not such as he, but of a far higher type; and even prodigals will venture to build on a goodness which they themselves sadly lack. How often the dissipated and profligate young man, when disgusted with his wretched life and with himself and not knowing whither to turn, feels that the most acceptable relief for his tortured mind would be to terminate with his own hand his miserable existence, were it not for the "something after death" which he dreads! It is that black shadow of fearful things to come, that "terrible of terribles," as Aristotle terms it—the horrid spectre of our evil deeds waiting to torment us beyond the grave—which drives us back rather to endure the ills we have

"Than fly to others that we know not of."

Yes, "life is sweet;" and should his putting out its light prove a mistake, certain it is that he cannot return to undo what he has done—to relume that light. So, inasmuch as there is no availing resource here, he must live on as best he can in this painful agony. The only possibility of making improvement on the blighted past—or, indeed, of satisfying the cravings of hunger, or even of

prolonging life—is to find his way back to the old home.

And how dear that name seems now as it comes up uncalled among the spectres of the past! To see it once more as it was in days gone by is indeed an impossibility, but to see it at all, after the horrors and depths into which he has been plunged, would be heaven begun below. He will go home. We hear him say, “I will arise and go to my father.” But how will he go? How can he go? Far away as that home is, how, in his deplorably needy condition, can he ever reach it? What he had sought as an advantage—that a great distance should separate him from the interference, or even the knowledge, of friends, so that his pleasures should not be disturbed—now turns to torment him. Were he near, he might find ways of communicating with the home people, of telling them that he still lives, but that he is near to death from starvation, and, appealing to them in pity’s name to help him, he might even have heard the gracious call, “Come back; all will be forgiven.” Possibly he might have been sent for. But sin has done its work thoroughly. It has swept away the last penny; it has broken him down in body and in spirit; it has wellnigh starved him; it has placed between

him and possible relief an apparently impassable barrier. But what else is there for him? Whither can he turn? No other hope reveals itself to his tortured mind but the old home. Difficult as is the undertaking, he will make the attempt. If he had known our familiar hymn, he might have said,

“I can but perish if I go :
I am resolved to try.”

Let us look at the circumstances of the prodigal's return which in some respects are favorable.

1. *He is forsaking the fruitful field of his follies and his sins.* Should he remain in that land, no matter what prosperity might come to him—if such possibility could be—there would always be reminders of what he had forfeited and lost. He would find himself in the condition to which prodigals are often brought, making difficulty in the way of restoration—the consciousness that his bad character is against him, that the confidence he might have had has been forfeited, and that, consequently, the avenues that might lead to a new and better life are barred to him. It will be best to escape from his bad record and bad associates. Change of place is sometimes indispensable to complete reformation. Elsewhere there may be hope ; he may make a new

beginning. Should he remain here, even should prosperity return and should he find paying occupation when teeming crops are gathered from the now parched and sterile acres, with the return of prosperity would come also the return of temptation; for when prosperity abounds, sin and Satan hold their revels as they cannot when men are starving. But the probabilities are small that such a contingency as prosperity will ever return to tempt him. What he needs, and needs at once, is a means to save life.

That is a blessed crisis when the prodigal resolves to bid farewell to the land of his sin, suffering and shame. How infinitely better had he never set foot upon it! How important for young men to keep out of proximity to sin, to "avoid it, pass not by it," to seek for themselves another field rather than run the risk of being led into sin! or, if that calamity has already occurred, how important a change of place and of associates in order to break the accursed bondage! If any here have been led into prodigal paths, would that they might find new scenes and new associates! In this particular it would be commendable to imitate the prodigal when he said, "I will arise and go"—go away from the scenes of my sorrows and my sins.

2. The prodigal is now to take his *first step out of peril*. All other steps had been leading him into trouble and keeping him in it. So long as he had the resources his was a downward march, farther and farther away from the father's house and farther and farther into the devil's domain. Now, for the first time, he is changing his course. He has brought his craft around, and is heading homeward.

How narrow the escape from total wreck! So near the rocks, the raging billows breaking and boiling around, destruction apparently inevitable, but just then the little craft is brought about and heads for the home port. How in after-life as we look back over the sea on which we have sailed, and perceive how narrowly we escaped fatal shipwreck, we have reason to recognize the protecting hand of a kind and gracious Providence!

Some of you who hear me can recall exposures and perils in this very city when you were so near moral shipwreck that you just did escape, and that was all. You came, perhaps, to the city a stranger; you found yourself surrounded with temptations. You were friendless and lonely; time hung heavily, especially after nightfall. Illuminated gateways to the domains of sin were inviting you in,

and the siren's dangerous voice fell for the first time upon your ear. You hesitated, you wellnigh yielded, but just then some mysterious influence—you scarce knew what—restrained you and held you back; and that has since proved to have been the turning-point of your life. For

“There is a time, we know not when,
A place, we know not where,
That marks the destiny of men
For glory or despair.”

What is that mysterious power that restrains and saves? No doubt the Hand divine, but extended, possibly, in answer to the mother's prayers offered in her rural home for her loved boy, a stranger, inexperienced and exposed amid the perils of a great city.

3. The prodigal is *returning wiser than he went*. Though he may have failed to learn in books and schools, he has learned in the school of experience lessons which have sunk too deep into his soul ever to be forgotten. It has been a hard tuition, it has cost him heavy blows of the rod, but its lessons can never be obliterated. It has taught him much in regard to the unsatisfactoriness of the world and in regard to sin's deceitful illusions. He has

learned by the teachings of privation and want that "the way of the transgressor is hard." Those "day-dreams" which used to brighten the horizon have proved miserable mockeries and have vanished before the severe realities of experience. He is returning wiser. He will be able to tell old associates of his youth something that he knows and they do not know, and to warn them not to venture on the dangerous and uncertain seas where he has been so nearly wrecked. He is returning greatly humbled. He went out proud and self-sufficient: "Oh yes; I can make my way in the world, and do not need to be instructed and cautioned." But he has changed his tone; he has come down from his self-sufficiency and loftiness. He cannot complain that he has not had ample opportunity to make the experiment and show what he can do. He has had the money and the field; he has not been restrained nor interfered with; all that he could reasonably ask has been offered him; and what now is the result? The result is a poor, wan, vanquished skeleton of a broken-down *roué*. This is the result of all that fine record he was to make for himself if only he could be released from the leading-strings of family government. This is what he has made of himself. But he is humbled now. He would

willingly be led by any one who would only do him a little kindness. What a pupil he would now make in a school where common sense and every-day wisdom are taught!

4. This leads us to remark that he is in *a favorable condition for being inducted into excellent ways and habits*. The average young man who has not gone out into the world and tried it for himself as the prodigal did is apt to be full of confidence in his power to resist temptation or to extract the pleasure from the world's good things without imbibing the poison. Our young man is now in the position of having tried the experiment, and upon no limited scale, and he has illustrated the utter fallacy of his judgment and self-confidence, and has shown that all his fine pictures of what he could do have proved signal failures—so much so that he has, no doubt, lost all reliance on his own judgment. The ordeal has been severe, but it has brought the haughty spirit into a tractable mood. It has wrought its good work, until now the wayward wanderer is docile as a little child. We have mentioned that he is retracing his steps. Retracing his steps literally he certainly is, for he is going home; he is taking the back track over the old road; and what he is doing literally is only the

image and shadow of the blessed course he is taking morally also.

What a

CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TWO JOURNEYS !

The young man came out fresh, hearty, vigorous, his youthful powers in perfection and in full play, fresh from associations adapted to enlighten and refine, well clothed, well mannered, well spoken, with plenty of money, possessed of all the elements of a young gentleman, worthy of respect and esteem—one who need find no difficulty in getting access to the most favored circles, to whom invitations would be freely sent and whose presence would be not only welcomed, but sought for. Yet now how changed ! Sunken cheeks, eyes staring, wasted and suffering, with tottering footsteps and wearing rags ! Poor relic !

Ah, friends ! sin, which destroys wherever it goes, has left its marks so deep that “time’s effacing finger” will never be able wholly to remove them. But when the sinner forsakes his evil ways there is reason for hope, and this sinner has now turned and is homeward bound. Possibly at the nearest seaport he finds a vessel sailing for his native land. Possibly some sailor with the proverb-

ially kind heart, learning of his pitiful condition and knowing who are his people, has compassion on him and gives him leave, by working his passage, to sail with the crew to the port nearest his home. At any rate, we know that he reached his native country once more.

THE EVER-MEMORABLE MEETING.

Suppose we turn for a moment from the poor wanderer to the little circle of home friends into whose hearts he has driven the iron so deep. That absent, wayward boy—how month after month they watched for his return! But time rolled on, and he came not. More than once—yes, many times, perhaps—when, as evening was closing in and an approaching traveler was seen against the horizon, hope had whispered that this was he. But, disappointed time and again, “hope deferred” had made “the heart sick,” and as month followed month, and possibly year followed year, bringing no tidings, they gave up all expectation of seeing him. His name probably had ceased to be mentioned; the trouble was too deep for conversation. Yet each member of the household revolved the sad thoughts for himself, letting no day pass when the lost boy was out of mind. Probably the father often walked

at eventide in the fields for meditation, and one evening a figure came in sight approaching over the hills. And such a sight is always an object of interest in a quiet neighborhood where there are but few passers-by. As the form drew nearer, though the aspect seemed uncouth, there was about it a strange something which held the father's gaze. Could it be his own poor wandering boy returning to his home? But that would be too good to be true. As the distance lessened hope whispered, *It is he.* *It is!* *It is the long-lost son!* No sooner does the thought reach the heart of the poor old father than he runs to meet the stranger, finds his hopes realized, falls on his son's neck and bathes him with tears.

The prodigal, in picturing to himself the meeting, had made up a speech—a humble and penitent confession of his evil conduct. He would say, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants.” It was a fitting speech for such a one to make. That consciousness of his sin, that deep self-abasement—the feeling that he was “not worthy”—speak well as to his knowledge of himself and his ill-deserts, and show that a change true and thorough has

been wrought. Now, in this meeting with his father, he begins his humble speech: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." He had intended adding, "Make me as one of thy hired servants," but he never got that out. Before he came to it the father's arms were embracing him, he was smothered in kisses of love, pity and joy and heartily forgiven for all his wrong-doings.

Oh, the trueness and warmth of that welcome! The old man had not a word of reproach—no, not one. How beautifully and touchingly this sets forth the full, free and hearty pardon of the returning penitent sinner, and how it reminds us that "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance"!

Supposing the family to have been in the old home, what a surprise and what a joy are in store for them! Their attention is attracted by the fact that the father, returning from his evening walk, has some one with him—a peculiar-looking figure; and as the old man enters—can it be?—he shows to the household the long-lost boy! Oh what joy! what sunshine! And what showers of tears! what heartiness of welcome! Not a word concerning the

son's bad conduct and the dreadful sorrow he has caused—no, not a word.

The prodigal could not have believed it. This is what breaks him down most of all—that when he had looked for rebuke and reproach, expecting that his wicked course should be thrown up to him, and that he would be bitterly chided, as he knew he well deserved to be, all should be forgiven and forgotten in a moment and he should be cordially restored to all the privileges and the honors of a son. This is amazing ; it is overpowering.

So thorough and hearty is to be the restoration to favor that every vestige of the past is to be removed, and instead thereof marks of distinction and favor are shown to him. The wayfarer is in rags, but he is quickly clothed in a costly and beautiful vesture. “Bring forth the best robe and put it on him,” says the father. Orientals then as now set much value on rich and expensive vestments, and the wealthy kept large supplies of them on hand. The choicest of these alone will meet the father's idea of what is demanded by an occasion so notable in the family history. None but the richest and the best will suffice to clothe and decorate this long-lost son, given up and mourned as dead, but now restored as it were to life and here among them home again.

Throw the rich robe around him and let it be seen that his improprieties and errors are not counted against him, but that he is reckoned as entitled to the very best—even as with that spotless garment of our Redeemer's righteousness we, beloved, prodigals as we are, are recognized as restored to full favor, our sins no longer laid to our charge and our sonship and household privileges re-established and complete.

The prodigal had purposed asking to be a hired servant, feeling that even this would be a favor far more than he had reason to expect, but the father dispels from his mind that idea by ordering shoes to be put on his feet, which could not be if he were to occupy a servant's place, as servants never wore shoes. Then, as if by every significant act to set forth and establish the restoration complete and entire and in its fullest scope of privilege and favor, a ring—the badge of distinction, honor and confidence and the pledge and seal of future love—is placed upon his finger. As the bridal-ring signifies, seals and stands as a pledge of the new relations of the bride, so does this ring consummate the full and entire restoration to sonship and re-establish his place in the rights and privileges of the household.

Assuredly, the father is not making partial or halfway work ; his old loving heart is too full of love, thankfulness and rejoicing for that. What time or occasion could be more befitting for a festival ? Bring out the fatted calf and kill it. Call in the neighbors ; let gladness spread all around. This must be a festive time ever to be remembered. The house so long darkened by the heavy shadow and burdened with sorrow now echoes with joy. The master bids all join the general gladness and mingle their joy with his : " We thought never to have seen him again here below, but here he stands in person. This, my son that was dead, is alive again ; he that was lost is found." So one and all share the gladness and the glee. The rafters vibrate with the music, and the floors shake beneath the dancers' feet.

Thus happily concludes a parable whose preceding stages had been so replete with pain. I would remind you that there is One waiting for us in the Father's house. We have wandered far away ; if with good resolves and relying on the help of Him who has prepared at infinite cost the way for our return, and who is willing and ready to show us the way home, we return, we shall find that our Father will stretch out the arms of love to embrace

us, and the angels shall shout for joy. For “ I say unto you that joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.”

HIGHER LIGHT ON THE PRODIGAL'S
STORY.

“Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

LUKE xv. 21.

VIII.

HIGHER LIGHT ON THE PRODIGAL'S STORY.

WE have been tracing the course of a young man who, under a false idea of the pleasures of sin, threw off the tedium and restraints of home, broke the bonds of good morals and allowed himself unlimited license, launching into every debauchery and sin and checked by nothing but lack of means and the pinchings of abject want. Brought at last to his senses, he returns to the forsaken home. We have heard the confession of his sin and seen his deep repentance and his unexpectedly kind and loving reception and restoration to the father's favor. The lessons taught ought to have impressed upon the minds and hearts of young men the folly and wickedness of seeking enjoyment in the ways of sin, the disappointing and ruinous nature of mere sensual pleasures, the imminent peril of hopeless wreck and ruin consequent upon launching into them, and the certainty that the path of purity and piety is the only path of safety.

It seems fitting to make a thoroughly spiritual and evangelical application, and to seek to impress the higher teachings that lie in this beautiful parable. Especially do I desire to impress the value of true religion, even though it had no other recommendation than as a sure protection to young men against the numerous and formidable perils to which they are exposed. It is the only reliable insurance against the assaults of the world, the flesh and the devil. Even for the present world a genuine Christian faith is of priceless value because of the moral safeguard it provides and the support it gives in the practice of purity and virtue. It is true that "godliness is profitable for this life, as well as for that which is to come." Many a young man has discovered, when too late, that the first fatal step in his downward course was when, almost persuaded to be a Christian, he failed to become altogether such. Had the better part then been chosen, the whole tenor of his subsequent life would have been changed: he would have been saved.

We come now, therefore, to present for consideration the higher and spiritual significance of this parable, showing the intent of our Lord to set forth the disastrous state into which sin leads all men by

nature and the necessity for penitently and humbly returning unto God if sinners would find peace here or hereafter.

Following the imagery of the parable let us notice at the outset

1. THE FATHER'S HOUSE.

Primarily, this is "the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," the immediate dwelling-place of the Most High, where in unveiled glory God sits in majesty surrounded by the holy angels and other high intelligences, inhabitants of that un-fallen world, the seat of his throne and the centre of universal empire. But in the relation of our subject it is not that of which we shall speak as our Father's house, but rather of the Church—the spiritual and invisible Church. All its members are children of the household, not by nature, but by grace, this being their peculiarity in God's great family. Angels and other exalted and un-fallen beings are his children by nature, his by creation, by reason of their pure and holy origin, which they have never forfeited. But his children in the Church—his spiritual Church—are not children by virtue of original creation: they are all adopted children. By nature estranged in sin and

alienated, by grace they have been brought back and received into the loving arms of the Father, and are enjoying all the privileges of children.

Admirable are the arrangements in this spiritual house. All that heart could wish is here—ample provision for every want, present or prospective, for time or for eternity, abundant comforts, the best of company and absolute safety; for “none,” says the Master of the house, “shall ever be able to pluck them out of my hand.” They are the redeemed of God in heaven and upon earth; they read their “title clear to mansions in the skies,” and are to enjoy the companionship of the angels and of the *élite* of the universe throughout the everlasting ages. What a household is this! What can be compared to our Father’s house, the home of all his loving children, redeemed by grace?

2. But by nature all of us are

WANDERERS FROM THE FATHER’S HOUSE.

Strange that we should turn our backs upon such a home. Strange, when the home is so fair, so attractive, so well provided—indeed, all that could possibly be asked—that any should desire to leave it and make their abode elsewhere. But, unfortu-

nately, it is characteristic of our race that there is an antipathy to the spirit and regimen of this home. There have come upon those who should be sons a want of sympathy in its employments and enjoyments and an indisposition to be subjected to the will and authority of its great Head. Their language is, "We will not have this man to reign over us." What he has appointed as best for their spiritual life and welfare, essential to the development of their highest interests for this world and for eternity, is not congenial to their ideas and tastes; so that they all with one accord depart from the household and go far away, seeking enjoyments and satisfactions elsewhere. "All we like sheep have gone astray." We do not by nature like God's way, and the language of our heart, if not of our lips, is, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" and we might add, "If thou dost not depart from us, we will depart from thee."

Certain it is that this is the prevailing spirit and characteristic of our race. We know full well, when the child is born, that as soon as it comes to discern good and evil it will present the same characteristic traits—the infirmities and sins of our common nature. We have just as much assurance of that as that the child will grow in stature or in

knowledge. We understand so well this characteristic of our race that if some time a ship far off in unknown seas could discover a new continent—could such a thing be supposable—it would not be regarded as necessary to go among the inhabitants to ascertain their moral type. We would feel assured, before setting foot on land, that they were erring, sinful creatures as certainly as that they were human beings. It is characteristic.

Yes, we have all left the Father's house. Abundant are the testimonies. What mean those penal laws upon our statute-books? They are to restrain men from doing evil. What are yonder strong walls and grated windows? To inflict penalties upon evil-doers. Why do these uniformed officials patrol our streets by day and through the livelong night? Why are there reformatory societies? Why Sunday-schools and churches? Why so much parental solicitude as to what children will be in after years? Why does the mother, when the boy leaves home for college, quietly and prayerfully deposit in his trunk a Bible with the inscription of love, "A Mother's Gift"? What is the reason? Is it not because she recognizes that her son is not an angel or an unfallen being, because she knows he is fallible, tainted with the virus which affects us all, be-

cause in the midst of the fresh temptations to which he may be exposed, untutored and inexperienced as he is in life's perils, she wishes him to have God's word, urged and enforced with the tenderness of a mother's love, as his safeguard and companion? Yes, on every hand—within, too, as well as without—are the testimonies to our fallen estate. We are all wanderers, and, notwithstanding the many moral restraints and the multiplied agencies for spiritual good, we will go astray.

3. THE SINNER'S SUBSTANCE IS SQUANDERED.

As it was with the prodigal, so it is with every sinner—sometimes in one way, sometimes in other ways; when not in vicious and immoral indulgences, in methods as real and as effective in estranging from the Father's house.

Take that man who thinks himself a model of good morals and propriety, upright and honest, sterling in integrity, yet even he fails to live for a good higher than this present world. Whatever else he may aim at, his aspirations never ascend to their divine source. They are of the earth, earthy, not heavenly and godly, not spiritual and divine. However well he may acquit himself after the manner of men in regard to the responsibilities

and obligations of this present life, when it comes to the higher and nobler life for which he is capacitated he fails to reach that even as to its beginnings; so that he has taken the invaluable substance with which almighty God the Father has endowed him, and is squandering it upon the things that perish.

Suppose an angel should come to this world from the high realms where the moral nature is perfect, where all the capacities expand as freely as men breathe the air, where the serenest and purest pleasures come as a thing of nature, where the soul stands monarch far above all groveling things of sin and sense, beautiful copy of the great Creator, having never erred, never been tainted by one dark spot; what, think you, would be the impressions of the angel-visitor on seeing beings created like himself in the image of God, and with moral and spiritual capacities like in some measure to his own, instead of aspiring upward to the Father for higher converse, purposely shunning it and persistently seeking after groveling objects such as are only provisional and temporary in their purpose and were never designed for the soul's chief good? Ah, sirs, we squander our good things. We cannot make mock at the prodigal or throw dirt at

him until we have cleansed our own garments and made our own record pure.

Substance? What substance has the Father not given us? Substance? Spiritual, impalpable substance, indeed, but substance capable of thought, capable of saying, "This is right" or "This is wrong," capable of high conceptions for good or groveling and damning conceptions for evil, capable of moving and moulding others to lofty aims and glorious achievements or for wallowing in the mire; substance which can outlive these mortal bodies when dust has turned to dust and ashes to ashes, and is capable of soaring beyond the stars and mounting up to God who gave it, and yet substance so squandered and misspent that its main thought is, "What shall I eat, what shall I drink and wherewithal shall I be clothed? How can I make most profit out of my neighbor? How can I pile up most gain? How can I climb the heights of ambition and make a name for myself? How can I do this?" Oh how he squanders his precious substance! Lips made to sing God's praise, and heart made to waft its incense high toward heaven, trammelled and fettered in these poor earthly things! Intellect, culture, capacity, influence, fascinations of manner,—all this God-bestowed "substance" per-

verted and prostituted to things of the earth earthy!

A father naturally wishes his son to do well. When a father parts with his son, sending him to fill a situation he has secured for him or to enter mercantile life or to study a profession, among other things he says to him, "Now, my son, try to make something of yourself. You have good abilities; don't throw them away. Try to make something of yourself." Suppose God our heavenly Father had spoken to you personally words of instruction; would he not have said substantially that—"Try to make something of yourself"? Oh how sad the dereliction, the failure as to the high end of life, should you make nothing of yourself as regards the spiritual and the immortal! His precious gifts, instead of being elevated to the high place for which they were designed—that you might be the sons of God in glory for ever—squandered on the lusts of money, the lusts of the flesh, the pride of life, ambition for place and power and the perishing things of a perishing world, consumed on something else, on anything else than on God and godly things! How true the language of the familiar old hymn,

"Like brutes we live, like brutes we die!"

What might we have been? Ah! that will be the thought when the scene has changed from earth, when the curtain which bounds time shall have been uplifted and the light of eternity let in. How many will ponder that question, and oh how solemnly, "What might I have been?" What might I not have been! "I might have been a sinner saved; I might have been a trophy of redeeming love, a ransomed spirit in the realms of everlasting light and life; I might have been where there is fullness of joy and where there are pleasures for evermore. But all is squandered beyond recall!" The precious immortal substance is squandered with a hand that knows no restraint and upon utterly unworthy if not riotous living!

4. All who wander from God like the prodigal are

IN A CONDITION OF WANT.

The restlessness and the dissatisfaction of the devotees of the world are proverbial. When did you ever see one who could say, "I am perfectly satisfied"? Some one may reply, "I have." Well, so have I, if you mean you have seen those who have said so. I have seen them when they said, "I am perfectly satisfied," but it was easy to see they were not satisfied; for when the theme was opened up,

you could see that here and there and on every hand there were desires and aims they would gladly have realized, but they knew it to be impossible. With nothing beyond this world's good, it is not possible that the human soul can be satisfied, for the reason that the immortal cannot be satisfied with the perishing.

The most illustrious of Roman emperors, when the empire was at the acme of its glory, with all that earth could give at his beck and call to minister to his desires—the most favored of all the sons of men—when asked, “What is needful, sire, to render your condition absolute perfection—all you could desire?” replied, “*Continuance.*” He knew it could not last. The immortal nature must have immortal food. The perishing things of this world were not designed even to satisfy the perishing creatures of this world. The cry virtually from every soul in its wanderings from God is, “Who will show us any good?”

Nothing does the unregenerate world need so much as a real, substantial, unfailing good. We talk of the great discoveries of our day, and some—perhaps many—are ambitious to become discoverers or inventors, that thereby they may win a great fame or a great fortune. Whoever can dis-

cover a really permanent, satisfying good for the human soul in mere earthly things would pile up the largest fortune ever made. There would be orders for it beyond the possibility of supply. The stock in the company would bring any price. All the Croesuses who hold the great fortunes of the world would bid high for it. How true that the eager, restless worldling, satiated at the banquets of lust, is still perishing with hunger ! How certain that none who stop short of gospel grace can ever realize the beatitude, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness ; for they shall be filled"—that real and true satisfaction is for such only as hunger and thirst after righteousness ! Certain it is that to every soul this hunger, unless appeased, must bring death—death to happiness, death to hope, death to all real, enduring good, death to the immortal soul ; unless something be done, the poor wanderer is absolutely certain to perish with hunger.

5. Consider

THE GRAND TURNING-POINT

—the sinner coming to himself. Like the poor prodigal, he is brought down by necessity, by want, by suffering, by providences of God that

have baffled and disappointed him and blasted his prospects and hopes. His thought of life is like that of Edmund Burke, who amid the bright honors of his ambition in the Parliament of England was informed of the death of his beloved and only son, and exclaimed, "What shadows we are! what shadows we pursue!" How in an instant that stroke disenchanted the brilliant orator as to the world's ambitions and the world's rewards! It pleases God sometimes to bring men to their senses by thus crushing their earthly hopes and letting them discover for themselves that these seeming good things are but phantoms treacherous and deceitful, that "all that's bright must fade," and that what seems in anticipation so supremely a thing to be desired is no sooner grasped than, like Sodom's apples, it turns to ashes. Worldlings not unfrequently learn from sad and bitter experience the vanity of the world, the utter unsatisfactoriness of all things here below, and are thus by a hard and wellnigh overwhelming discipline brought to their senses.

All men, indeed, in their natural condition are out of their senses. They see things reversed; they see eternal things distant, insignificant, obscure, unattractive, unimpressive, and they see temporal

things attractive, important, engrossing and swollen in magnitude until they fill the whole horizon. The man's moral and immortal nature is in a distorted, morbid, diseased condition. But when these fallacies and phantoms are dispelled, when sad and sorrowful experience, when disappointment, misfortune and disaster, or when the light of God's Spirit let into the soul, shows that the life has been an illusion, we learn that the world is vanity, that it can "never give the bliss for which we sigh," that the little we get is but for a little while, that at best we must soon leave it and go down to the grave, submitting to the decree, "Naked came I into the world, and naked must I go out of it. Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

Are not men insane, putting money, real-estate, stocks, pleasures, trifles, above the immortal soul? Not only doing that, but attempting a most fatal experiment—that of trying and testing for themselves the question what it shall profit a man if he shall gain the world and lose his soul? But, happily, the prodigal is disenchanted. Reflection comes; he begins to change his views. Serious convictions arise that this kind of life has been a mistake—not only that it has been a mistake, but that it has been a sin; and a sin not only against God, but against

his own soul—a sin against Heaven and against his eternal welfare. Under the influence of these meditations, so just and so true, and under the convictions of conscience, he at last concludes and determines to leave the far-off land and seek a better portion.

6. Let us look, then, at

THE HAPPY DECISION.

“I will arise and go to my Father.” I have been a wanderer, but I will wander no more. I have gone, alas! too far astray, but by God’s grace I will return. How much is involved in those three words, “I will arise”! One who had just been brought back from far-off paths of sin said to me that after groping and struggling for days without finding pardon and peace, it all at once occurred to him that the thing for him to do was to go to Jesus, and that instantly something within him said, “I will.” From that moment he felt like another man, and ever since his purposes and his experiences have been for the Lord.

But how many stop before they reach this point! How many, though they have learned the unsatisfactoriness of the world and the deceitfulness of sin, still are not prepared to take the decisive step of

the prodigal, saying, "I will arise and go to my Father"! They still linger in the far-off land; they still refuse to make an effort to escape, and sometimes they perish with the blessed possibility only almost realized. One thing, therefore, we should lay to heart among the teachings of this parable—the imperative importance, when an impenitent sinner is impressed with the error of his ways, that he should at once resolve to renounce his sinful state and get out of it, saying, "I will arise." Then instantly the resolve should be carried out. The struggle may be severe, but the victory will be great. When the sins have been confessed, when the soul has been truly humbled, when the resolution and the purpose to seek the favor of God have been fixed, the sinner has passed the turning-point and begun the journey which leads to righteousness, peace and everlasting life.

The prodigal will arise, and he will not seek to make any palliation of his course; he will make no attempt to smooth matters over or to put upon his conduct a better face than it deserves. He will meet the case squarely, with all its seriousness and aggravations, and will confess judgment. He will "make a clean breast of it," keeping back nothing. He will acknowledge his sin: "Father, I have

sinned. I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and, more than that, I am not worthy to be restored to favor; I do not deserve to be called thy son. Give me only a servant's place; put me into the lowliest position—I am unworthy of any other. Only let me come back and share thy presence, hear thy words and see thy face; no matter how abject may be my place, it will be all I ask, and far more than I deserve.

“Show pity, Lord; O Lord, forgive;
Let a repenting rebel live:
Are not thy mercies large and free?
May not a sinner trust in thee?”

“My sins are great, but can't surpass
The power and glory of thy grace;
Great God, thy mercy hath no bound;
So let thy pard'ning love be found.”

Yes, this is the spirit of the prodigal's return to the Father's house, and rest assured it is a spirit which will be recognized and will find welcome. “To this man will I look,” saith the Lord, “to him that is of a broken and a contrite heart, and that trembleth at my word.”

7. Consider

THE SINNER'S CORDIAL RECEPTION.

We read in this parable of the elder brother in the old home and that he was upright and faithful, but we do not read that he ever expressed any special concern for his long-lost brother or that he ever suggested sending out to search for him. The prodigal was left to find his way back—if he should ever think of returning—as best he could. How discouraging the condition of the poor creature! How great his uncertainty as to his reception—whether he would not be chided, whether he would not have his bad conduct flung in his face, whether the home people would not mock at him and turn away, telling him he had made his bed and he must lie upon it—that he had chosen to receive his inheritance in advance and he must stand by his decision. The prospects were not cheering; there was no encouragement to the prodigal.

But there *is* encouragement abundant to such prodigals as we are, for in our Father's house on high there is an Elder Brother, and one who not only pities us, but himself comes out to seek and find us, risking every peril and sacrifice—indeed, actually offering up his own life—to secure our safe and welcome return. “Lo, I come, says he; in the

volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O God ;” and that “will” was that he should come to this world of prodigals, live among them, set them an example, teach them, labor with them, determine to spare nothing to restore them, even to sacrifice life if necessary. And this is what he did. He came, he suffered, he died. “He gave his life a ransom for many.” How vast our advantage over the prodigal, God by his Son—yes, and by his Holy Spirit too—calling us back, drawing us with the cords of love, following us, bearing with our infirmities, encouraging and cheering us, and never wearying !

Should we not return ? Rest assured there will be a welcome. See the joy—the joy even in heaven itself. Yes, the penitent sinner comes—comes self-condemned and feeling that he deserves no favor ; but see the joy that awaits him. He comes. He hears the gentle invitation, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” He comes. He finds the hand marked with the wound-prints made for guilty sinners stretched out to grasp his poor trembling hand ; he finds an almighty arm to support him ; he finds a heavenly light shining into his hitherto-darkened mind ; he finds all sense of condemnation removed ;

he finds the burden of unpardoned sin uplifted ; he finds a sweet peace stealing through his hitherto troubled soul, and he hears the welcome, never-to-be-forgotten words, “Thy sins which are many are all forgiven thee.” Joy ! joy for ever ! He that was dead is made alive ; he that was lost is found !

THE END.

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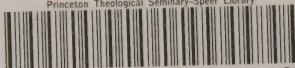
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